

TALES FROM THE BHĀGAVATHAM

RETOLD FOR CHILDREN



BY THATHA

Tales From The Bhagavatham Retold For Children

By P . S . Krishna Iyer

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For Private Circulation Only

PREFACE

It will be generally agreed that some of the happiest moments of our life were those spent listening to bedtime stories told by our doting old grand parents. Very often they may be repeating the same old story; but that did not matter at all. "Hullo Children, come here. Once upon a time there was a king" and the story would go on and children would be in fairyland. Now on reflection, we realize that these bed time stories served a great purpose. Children were led to appreciate bravery, truthfulness, honesty, goodness etc and detest sins. And all this was accomplished in the least expensive and psychologically most effective way. Unfortunately all these have changed.

Thousands of miles separate modern grand parents from their grand children to the detriment of both. This defect can be overcome to some extent through good storybooks and only through books. Advice from parents, however good, can be awfully boring; it may even have negative effects. Stories from Greek classics served a good purpose. Heroes by Kingsly and Tanglewood tales by Hawthorne are typical. They increased the child's vocabulary and language power in the most natural way, through context; not through dictionary.

A clear understanding of our own numerous deities is necessary. They are just concepts leading to the grand philosophy of the Gita.

Hoping that the book will find favour with children and the kind indulgence of the elders.

Your Servant

P.S. Krishna Iyer



OM! NAMO BHAGAVATHE VASUDEVAYA

After the great holocaust of Mahabharata when most of the friends and all the enemies of Pandavas were slain, Parikshit, the grandson of Arjuna was installed as the king at Hastinapura (Modern Delhi). He was as valorous as his father Abhimanyu and invincible like his grandfather Arjuna and it seemed that Krita Yuga had once again returned. But it was not to be. All things must change.

The king went out a hunting. It was essential to keep the wild animals at bay. After a daylong hunt, the king got separated from his attendants. He was very thirsty and looking about, saw an ashram (hermitage) at a distance. Taking off his shoes and with folded arms the king gently entered the ashram and there saw an old sage, Maharishi Angeras sunk in deep meditation. Parikshit tried to rouse him but the sage would not open his eyes. In a weak moment the king was overcome with anger. A serpent had cast off its coils near by. With the end of his bow the king took it up and placed it round the neck of the meditating saint and departed.

The bad news soon reached the ears of Sringi, the son of Angeras. At once, surrounded by his playmates he returned to the ashram and saw the dead snake round his father's neck. He burst into tears. Hearing that, it was done by the king himself, he flew into a rage and taking a handful of water in his palms pronounced a terrible curse. He said, "On the seventh day from now the king shall die of snake bite, bitten by Takshaka"

Angeras Maharishi hearing the hubbub woke from his samadhi. On hearing all that had happened, he was displeased with his son. He said, "What have you done my son! The king is a great ruler. Who will protect us, ensuring peace all around, enabling us to pursue tapas? You must go at once and beg for pardon." Sringi was abashed to hear this.

Meanwhile the king too had heard of the curse. Too late he repented for his conduct. A Brahmin's curse was irrevocable and death was certain. But he now wanted to know how to meet it remembering Hari always and of course at the last moment.

The ministers - most of them being sages and rishis - advised him to call on a great conference. News spread fast, couriers were sent to distant parts of the kingdom and even outside. A vast concourse assembled on the banks of the Ganges. Bhagavan Atri, and the great sages Vasishta, Chyavana, Bhrigu, Angeras, Bharadwaj, Gautama, Agastya, Dwaipayana, Viswamitra, Sri Narada himself and many others had assembled. When all were comfortably seated, the king asked them what a dying man should do to realize God. . While they were debating, there came by accident as it were Vyasa Maharshi's son Sri Suka, the bachelor saint , always sixteen years old, glowing like the rising sun. The great assembly rose en-masse and conducted him to the acharya's seat.

Parikshit said, "It is certainly our great good fortune that Bhagavan has chosen to come amongst us. Kindly tell us what a mortal facing death should do to realize Hari"

Sri Suka replied "Oh! King! Your question is most opportune. We all face death any moment. At least you have the certainty of living for seven days. Consider this whole universe as the manifestation of Sri Hari. His feet are in the nether world; His waist and abdomen constitute the earth. His head is the heavenly region. His eyes are the sun and moon. His heart is Truth itself. Contemplate on this divine form and before long you will be merged in Him enjoying great peace and ecstasy."

Sri Suka continued. "Sri Hari takes various forms. The most pleasant is Adi Narayana with four arms carrying the conch, the disc, the mace and the lotus, lounging on the serpent body of Adishesha with the ever-constant Sri Devi attending with all the other Parshadas. It is Vaikunta, glistening with golden domes and marble palaces. All the blessed inhabitants look alike and are in the prime of youth. The women resemble their mistress Sri Devi. The fragrance of heavenly flowers exude from them, and they sing hymns praising the glory of the Lord. Even the parrots chant Vedas. It is all so pleasant. But, Sri Narayana wanted a change. It came about as follows."

Thus Bhagavan Sri Suka started to tell the sacred story of the lord The Bhagavatham.

CONTENTS

Chapter 1	1 - 7
Coming of Kapila	
Mother and Son	
Chapter 2	8 - 12
The Great Daksha Yagam	
Chapter 3	13 - 16
The Story of Dhruva	
Chapter 4	17 - 21
The Story of Venan	
Prithu and Archis	
Chapter 5	22 - 26
Prachinabarhis and His Sons the Prachetases	
The Allegory of King Puranjana	
Chapter 6	27 - 35
Prachetas	
Daksha's Daughters	
Priyavrata	
Agnidhra and Purvajithi	
The Story of Nabhi	
Chapter 7	36 - 41
The Story of Bharata	
Bharata the Brahmin	
Bharata and Rahugana	

Chapter 8

42-53

Ajamila

The Story of Ajamila

Indra's Disrespect of Guru

Narayana Kavacham

The Strange Request of Devas to Dadichi

The Battle Between Indra and Vritra

How Indra Was Saved From The Sin Of Brahmahatya

Chapter 9

54-63

Prahlada

Prahlada's Childhood

The Story of Mayan, the Master Builder of The Asuras

Varna Ashrama Dharmam

Chapter 10

64-68

Gajendra Moksham

Previous History of The Elephant and Alligator

Chapter 11

69-81

The Great Churning

The Coming Of Mohini

The Great Deva Asura War

Sri Siva's Illusion

The Manwantaras And Revival Of Bali

The Payovrita

Chapter 12

82-92

Matsyavataaram The Lord's Avatar As Fish
Ambarisha
Thrisanku And Viswamitra
Sagara And His Aswamedha
Bhagiratha Brings Ganga
Khatvanga
Khatvanga's Descendants

Chapter 13

93-107

Ramayana
Ahalya Moksham
Mithila: Janaka's Court
Parasurama

Chapter 14

108-111

Yayati
Sakuntalam
Rantideva

Chapter 15

112-131

Sri Krishna Avataram
Brahma's Hymn of Praise
Trinavarta
Yasoda's Vision
Krishna Is Bound To A Wooden Mortar
Liberation of Nalakubera And Manigriva
Their Previous History
Trek to Brindavan
Krishna And The Old Fruit Vendor
Bakasura The Crane
The Salvation of Aghasura
Brahma's Vision
Parikshit's Doubt

Chapter 16

132-141

The Death of Dhenuka
Kaliya Mardanam
The Women's Prayer
Previous Story of Kaliya
The Summer Season - Pralamba's Attack
Saved From The Forest Fire
The Rainy Season
Autumn

Chapter 17

142-159

Music of the Flute
Karthiyayani Penance
Salvation of the Brahmin Women
Preparation for the Indra Yagna
Lifting of Govardhan
Divinity Realized
Krishna's Abishek Or Holy Bath
Revelation of Vaikunta
Rasalila
The Song of The Gopis
Sudarsana's Salvation
Sankhuchuda's Salvation
Yugala Geethem
The Death of Arishtasura, the Ox Demon
Kesi's Death
Vyomasura The Magician

Chapter 18 160-178

Akrura's Vision

Akrura's Hymn

Krishna In Mathura

Further Adventures

The Episode Of The Crooked Sundari

Dhanur Yagna

The Brothers At Sandipani Ashram

Udhava And The Gopis

Chapter 19 179-192

Confrontation with Jarasandha

Dwaraka

Muchukunda Moksham

Rukmini's Marriage

Rukmini's Letter

The Story of the Jewel Syamanthaka

The Destruction Of Narakasura

The Story of Nriga

Diversion of Yamuna

Paundraka Moksham

Dwivida The Monkey

Chapter 20 193-213

Pradyumna

Krishna at Indraprastha

Khandava Dahanam

A Lover's Quarrel

The Story of Usha And Anirudha

Dragging Of Hastinapura

Krishna the Householder

The Lord's Daily Routine

Fight With Jarasandha

Elimination Of Salva and Dandavakra

Chapter 21 214 - 217

The Story of Kuchela Or Grace Supreme

Chapter 22 218 - 224

The Great Reunion

Devaki Sees Her Dead Sons Again

Krishna's Visit To Srutadeva And Janaka

The Hymn of the Vedas

The Story Of Vrikasura, Sri Siva And Sri Hari

Vrikasura

Chapter 23 225 - 231

Recovery of the Brahmin's Children

Krishna The Infinite

The Curse Of The Brahmins

Sermon of the Navayogis

Devas Request For The Lord's Return

Chapter 24 232 - 253

Avadhuta's Twenty-Four Gurus

The Story Of Pingala The Courtesan

Limitations Of Vedic Ritualism

The Song Of The Swan

More About The Sanyasin

The Bhikshu's Story

The Bhikshu's Song

Pururava And Urvashi

Krishna Bids Farewell

Chapter 25

254 - 262

The End Of The Yadavas

Krishna's Ascension

Advent Of Kaliyuga

Time Another Aspect Of God

Parikshit Attains Moksham

Janamejaya's Sacrifice

Chapter 26

263- 272

The Story Of Markandeya

Maya Darsanam - Sutha Continued

Markandeya Has Vision Of Sri Rudra

CONCLUSION

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The Sanat Kumaras, the great Rishis were closest in attendance on the Lord. They were four in number and all looked like five-year-old children. They could travel anywhere in the universe with the speed of thought on missions of peace and goodwill. It happened that they were just on such a mission and the same thought occurred to all of them . They said to each other, “Brothers, we have been absent from our Lord too long; let us return.”

The next moment they were at the gates of Vaikunta and holding each other by the hand they confidently entered the first of the seven golden gates, when they were brusquely stopped by two gigantic guards with crossed lances. The guards said. “Stop! Sri Narayana and Sri Devi have retired to rest. Wait till they wake up.” The Kumaras were stunned. There was no time restriction for entry to heaven. But the guards were adamant. The Kumaras became angry, which was something quite unusual. They said, “You two do not deserve to be here! Go down to the lower regions and after expiating your sins you can come here again”.

The Lord of course, knew that something was amiss and with Sri Devi came down to set things right. The Lord appeared before them along with Sree Devi. Everyone prostrated, feeling rather guilty. The Supreme Lord said, “You Kumaras and you Dwara palakas, do not feel guilty. It was all my wish. Now the curse pronounced by the Kumaras cannot be revoked. But I give you a choice. You can return to me after three birth - death cycles

as my enemies or after seven birth - death cycles as my devotees”.

The giant guards replied, “We cannot wait for seven births and deaths. We would rather choose the shorter course of three cycles”. Their request was granted. Immediately the gigantic guards were thrown head downwards to earth.

We have now to revert to the events happening with Kasyapa Prajapati. It is needless to say that Brahma’s son Kasyapa Prajapati was a very great Maharishi. He had two wives, Diti and Aditi. The devas (gods) were the sons of Aditi, Indra being the eldest and most powerful. Diti also underwent rigorous tapas for children. Kasyapa was pleased and resolved to bless her also with sons; but she would not wait for the right time. The sun was setting and it was time for prayer; but Diti did not mind all that. Overcome with sudden passion, she enticed the protesting Kasyapa. He said, “Oh! My dear, this is time for worship of my brother Sri Rudra who is presently going round the universe accompanied by his followers and his ire will be roused if people misbehave.” But Diti would not hear. It was fate. Just then the two guards were hurtling towards the world and they entered her womb

Diti knew that they were asuric (demoniac) and suppressed them for a hundred years within her womb. There were ominous signs. The atmosphere became intolerably hot, jackals howled, owls hooted and showers of red-hot stones fell from the sky. The twins named Hiranyakasipu and Hiranyaksha were born and they grew apace. Their golden crowns touched the clouds. As they walked around, the earth trembled. The seas swept over the land. As Hiranyaksha the younger brother stepped into the sea, it was only knee deep. It was water all around. The sages and gods, as usual appealed to Sri Hari who immediately took the form of a huge boar and plunged into the sea. And then ensued a fierce battle, which lasted many days with many ups and downs and

many an anxious moment for the sages. At last Sri Hari gave a fierce blow and the demon fell dead .

Hiranyakasipu heard about the terrible death of his brother and resolved to avenge it. He thought, “I must be well prepared. By intense tapas I will acquire such boons as will make me invincible.” With this unholy resolve he left his queen and kingdom and repaired to the forest and undertook unheard of austerities, - such as standing on one leg only and fasting all the time. Birds settled on his matted locks, wild bees stung his face and carnivorous ants slowly devoured his body. Fumes and tongues of flame began to shoot from his body because of the intensity of his tapas. Thus he continued his tapas for long long years.

Meanwhile important events were happening in the regions ruled by the Manus. Here the land was broad and the forests were green. The broad rivers and the numerous sparkling rivulets made the land almost like another heaven on earth. The workers toiled happily. There was peace and plenty everywhere and the elderly sages stayed in the forests engaged in tapas. Over this blessed land ruled, the king Swayambhuva Manu with queen Satarupa.

Kardama was a renowned sage, young and handsome. He wished there were more people. When a great rishi has a particular wish, God at once fulfills it. And so it happened. The next day, emperor Swayambhuva Manu came riding in a golden chariot accompanied by his queen Satarupa and their beautiful daughter Devahuti. They saluted the young sage and said “Sir, I have been told that you intend to marry and we humbly entreat you to accept our beautiful daughter as your partner. She is qualified in every respect, by her age, character and upbringing. We will be blessed if you accept her. O! Great Sage!” The sage was pleased for this was what he himself had desired and accepted the bride. Leaving their daughter in the ashram the king and the queen returned to

their capital. They gave their daughter many costly and useful gifts and with a tearful farewell left her in the hermitage.

The princess was the ideal Hindu wife. She would sleep only after her husband had slept. She would get up early before him and sprinkle holy water in front of the ashram. She kept the ashram clean; gathered flowers for the pooja and attended on him like his shadow. Thus years rolled by and Devahuti became thinner. Her veins showed under the skin. The Maharishi noticed it and he was overcome with pity. He asked her what she wanted and she replied, "My lord! I want what every woman wants. Children from you my wedded husband." The sage relented and said, "My dear, You are emaciated and weak. Take a dip in that lake Bindusara near the river Saraswathy."

The princess obeyed and entered the lake. And then a wonderful thing happened. She was surrounded by hundreds of damsels who bathed her and dressed her with beautiful garments. They adorned her with divine ornaments and flowers. The princess became very beautiful and radiant. Such was the Rishi's tapas. He himself became gloriously handsome like a god. The hermitage too was changed into a marvellous mansion with hundreds of rooms and terrace above terrace. The golden domes on top gleamed in the morning sun. The servants were clad in golden dresses. They were eager and anxious to carry out any order. Devahuti knew that all this was due to the power of the Rishi's tapas. But the most wonderful thing about this palace was that it was a flying mansion. They had only to wish and it would fly swiftly over the clouds to wherever they wanted. In this way they spent a happy time in the gardens of the gandharvas, demi-gods, and in the gardens around mount Kailas itself. Sometimes they would be on mountain tops amid the rolling clouds or on mountain slopes amid the tall cedar trees., Birds of every hue flitted here and there.

The sunshine reflected from their wings and their warbling sounds filled the air. Was there ever a honeymoon like this?

But alas! Everything must end. The Maharishi woke up as from a sleep and realized that he had strayed from the path of Brahman far too long. Meanwhile nine daughters were born all of the same age, as fair as the dawn.

Devahuti was sad. She could read his mind. Kardama sadly said “My dear wife, now I must go. I have given you most beautiful children as I had promised.” With a wistful look, Devahuti sadly said, “My lord! I have been a foolish woman hankering after fleeting, foolish pleasures. With such a great husband as you, I should have earned the way to everlasting bliss. Besides, how can I - a lone woman - find suitable matches for these our beautiful daughters? And my lord, I would like to have a son who would be a support and guide me to salvation.”

The great sage relented. He remembered that God had promised to be born as his son. He agreed to stay for some time more.

Coming Of Kapila.

In due time Devahuti gave birth to a beautiful son. There were auspicious sounds all around . A gentle breeze wafted heavenly fragrance. Wild animals became tame and gentle. Devas and angels with Brahma at their head appeared overhead with garlands in token of worship. For, it was their own lord, - the lord of the universe - who had come down to this sphere, to dispel the doubts of rishis and establish Sankhya dharma for the salvation of mankind!

Kardama and Devahuti prostrated before their child who had assumed his true form with four hands bearing the conch, the disc, the mace and the lotus.

Now Kardama, his mission over, arranged the marriage of his daughters with nine renowned sages; Anasuya with Athri, Arundhathi with Vasishta and so on. Kardama took a last look at his divine son and bidding a tender farewell to the princess left for the Himalayas.

Mother and Son

Devahuti was now left alone with her son. She realized that her son was Vishnu (God) incarnate. With folded hands she said, “I am deeply distressed my Lord. Deceived by the senses, I have wasted my time in sensual enjoyments. Save me from these and teach me how to reach that eternal bliss from which there is no return.”

And the son, remembering that his body was derived from her, addressed her with great tenderness, “O Mother! This mind is the seat of everything good or bad. In association with the evil, it takes on that color but the same mind in association with the good and the saintly, becomes like them. These saintly people will always do good actions or talk about godly things and enchanting stories about my actions and me. When people hear about my glory, I enter through their ears and their hearts melt and they see the whole world as their kin. They see myself present everywhere. Thus of all methods of reaching me, none is so pleasant or safe as the path of devotion. And therefore O Mother! You too leave off all thoughts of relatives or home and I assure you, you will come to me.”

Kapila then set off to the Himalayas with the permission of his mother and at Badariyasram began to do tapas. Though he was God himself, he did tapas as an example to all yogis and taught Sankhya philosophy. It is said that he is still there, clearing the doubts of all earnest seekers as Sankhya Acharya.

Devahuti now lived in a cottage by the side of river Saraswathi. She forgot her physical existence. Her mind fixed on Vasudeva , she finally merged in Him . Her body became a sparkling river known as Sidhitha . You may see it even today rolling over saligrama murmuring “Sivoham! Sivoham! “

The Great Daksha Yagam

Devahuti had a sister Prasuti by name and she was married to Daksha Prajapati, a son of Brahma himself. This Daksha was the doyen of all the priests, performing elaborate rituals and sacrifices. On one occasion all the priests and sages assembled together and performed a famous sacrifice. Daksha, shining like the sun, entered there. Every one stood up in respect and awe except Brahma and Rudra.

Daksha noticed it. He went up to Brahma (his father) and saluted him formally and took his seat, ignoring Sri Rudra - who was one of the trinity. Daksha stood up and casting a baleful look at Sri Rudra declaimed, "Look at this presumptuous upstart. Obeying my father Brahma, I gave my doe eyed daughter to this monkey-eyed beggar whose abode is the burning ghat. He smears himself with ashes from the funeral pyre. The serpent is his necklace and ghosts and goblins are his attendants."

But Sri Rudra, the great God that he was, calmly stood up and departed with his attendants. However Nandiswara, foremost among Sri Rudra's followers could not contain himself and cursed Daksha and his progeny to be idolatrous, slaves of women, traders in mantras with no real Brahmin hood. Bhṛigu of Daksha's camp flung curse for curse prophesying that saivites would follow unclean methods and unholy tantric practices. Thus heartily cursing each other they departed.

Years passed without any diminution in the enmity between father in law and son-in-law.

One day Dakshayani (Sati) observed the sky thick with bright chariots of the celestials drawn by snow-white swans. The gods and demi gods with their highly bedecked consorts were moving in the direction of her father's palace. From their talk Sati understood that they were going to attend a grand Yagna called Brihaspati Seva and it was to be conducted by her father. They talked of the grand festivities and the rich presents they would get.

Sati's heart yearned to go and to her lord she said, "My lord! Your father-in-law is conducting a great yagna. All the celestials with their brides are going. My dear sisters with their husbands will be there and I too long to be with them, along with you. You are generous. You have given to me half of your body even. We have not been invited, what then? One can go to a friend's house or to one's father's house or one's guru's ashram without invitation."

Sri Rudra replied, "Your observations are correct. We can go uninvited to the house of a good friend but not to that of one who is envious and looks with an evil eye. The evil words of a proud man rankle in the heart much more than the sharp arrow of an enemy. If you go, it will not be good for you and may even end in death".

With this the Jagat-Guru retired and remained silent. Sati was not convinced. She became restless looking up; she saw the sky, teeming with the celestials. She retired into the hermitage, and again came out into the open. She trembled with anger at her Lord and finally decided to go without his permission.. But Nandiswara and others would not let her go alone. Nandi the bull carried her on his back, Maniman sounded the conch, others sounded the cymbals and the godly procession soon reached the yagna sala. Her sisters and mother received her with great

affection but Daksha frowned and even said, “Who asked you to come?” Sati ignored the taunt but noted that her Lord was ignored. No seat was set apart for the Lord of the Yagna. Her anger blazed.

“You hate the great Lord Siva by uttering whose name a dying man is absolved of all sins and is released from further birth and death. Such an all-merciful all forgiving God you hate. I am ashamed of this body, which is derived from you.”

Then sitting in the lotus posture and concentrating on the feet of her Lord her body was consumed in a trice by holy fire.. The ganas of Rudhra tried to avenge her death in vain. Bhrigu reciting a mantra poured an oblation in the holy fire and hordes of demi gods armed to the teeth arose from the fire and put to flight the followers of Sri Rudra.

Sri Narada Maharishi who could travel anywhere broke the sad news to Sri Rudra. But the great God being omnipresent had known everything. Sri Rudra became furious. He sprang up and from his matted locks, plucked a strand and hit the earth with it. A huge gigantic form, Veerabhadra with a golden crown and wielding a trident flashing flames danced round Siva. Prostrating before the great God he addressed him thus, “Your servant my lord, what shall I do?” The Lord said, “Go! And destroy Daksha and his yagna. You are the foremost of my commanders.”

Veerabhadra roared with delight and accompanied by all the myrmidons of Siva, sped towards the yagna sala. The earth trembled under their feet, the sky darkened. A whirlwind destroyed everything before them heralding their coming. The sages conducting the yagna were frightened. Ladies of the royal household , Sati’s mother and sisters , trembled with fear. And all at once the avengers were upon them. With flaming torches they set fire to the yagnasala. Nandiswara caught hold of Bhrigu and said, “You proudly stroked your beard when the great Lord Siva

was insulted. .” Saying so he plucked off his beard. Pushana the sun god, - who had derisively laughed earlier - had his teeth knocked out. Daksha put up a brave fight but Veerabhadra caught hold of him, wrenched his head off and threw it into the sacrificial fire.

Thus ended the great Daksha yagna. The devas were not too pleased. Was not Daksha their great leader, master of Vedic hymns, who sustained them with frequent yagnas.? And now who will conduct great yagnas? How can they derive their strength from the yagnas now?

They approached Brahma and requested him to pacify Sri Rudra and revive Daksha. Brahma replied, “All of you and Daksha in particular have deeply offended Sri Rudra, the embodiment of calmness. Still I shall come with you and try to console Sri Rudra who is in deep grief over the demise of his dear wife”. So they formed a great procession and with Brahma at their head, slowly wended their way to Sri Kailas, the abode of Sri Rudra. On the way they had to cross many valleys and rivers and wooded forests with magnificent trees like cedar, devadaru, and sandal wood. Their giant branches were raised to heaven as if in prayer, entwined with tendrils of jasmine and many sweet smelling flowers. They passed by many lakes of crystal clear water crowded with blue lotuses and the thousand petalled lotuses called souganthika. Heavenly damsels, the apsaras sported with their spouses in these lakes. On and on they passed. Parrots, cranes and peacocks were flying in swarms overhead all singing the praises of the Creator .Still they pushed on and passed by the hermitages of sages, who had reached various stages of realization. They passed through the land of the yakshas guarded by holy rivers, the Nanda and Alakananda. Finally, they approached Sri Kailas, the abode of Sri Rudra. There they saw a great banyan tree and under it’s spreading

branches was Sri Rudra himself. The crescent moon shone like a jewel in his matted locks. The embodiment of calmness, He was sitting cross-legged . His body so dear to the sages was smeared with ashes. Holding the japamala in one hand and indicating the chin mudra with the other, he was instructing the sages Sri Narada Sanaka Sananda and many others. The sages were sitting around in deep attention

On seeing Brahma Sri Rudra arose and prostrated before him as a son should and so did all the others. Then Brahma said, “O! Rudra! You are the all merciful, all-powerful, the all seeing one. It behoves you to forgive this Daksha and his followers for their ignorance. Be pleased to give Daksha his life, Brigu his beard, Pushana his teeth and wisdom to all.”

Sri Rudra smilingly replied “Indeed! I do not want to punish these foolish people who are subject to Maya.”

Daksha’s followers repented for their mistakes and humbly requested Sri Rudra to accompany them and see that the yagna was completed. Sri Rudra graciously agreed and followed them to the yagna sala. Daksha’s head had been burnt up. So they substituted it with the head of the sacrificial goat. Its beard was grafted on Brigu’s chin. It was decreed that Pushana would get only puddings as sacrificial offerings, as he had no teeth. Now Vishnu (Hari) also appeared and in the presence of the Trinity the great yagna was concluded. All the gods and sages returned to their respective abodes chanting the Rudram and Chamakam, Daksha leading them all.

These verses are recited with great gusto even to day by learned pundits all over the land.

À peques se/afleões Neúe/Neúe >
 pe/afleões o/Neúe k/Neúe/Neúe =cô: >
 úe/Neúe f/Neúe/Neúe/Neúe/Neúe/Neúe >>

The Story of Dhruva

Suruchi the younger was the favourite wife. One day, the king was sitting on his throne with the younger wife Suruchi. Her son Uthama was sitting on the lap of the king. The king fondled the younger prince Uthama. The elder prince Dhruva was playing nearby and he also wanted to be fondled by his father. Dhruva toddled up to the throne and climbed up the steps to sit on his father's lap. The haughty queen pushed him aside and said, "If you want to sit on your father's lap you should be born as my son. Go away to the forest and pray to Hari to be born as my son."

Dhruva began to cry when he heard her taunting words. But he was a king's son. He hissed like a serpent that was beaten by a rod and ran to his mother. The poor queen took him up in her arms and kissed him. From Dhruva's playmates the queen heard about it all and began to shed tears. In her distress, she called upon Lord Hari. She took the child in her lap and said tearfully," Beloved son, Lord Hari is your unfailing refuge. You were born to an unfortunate one. The king is ashamed even to look at me. You are suckled and brought up by me who am most unfortunate.. We are all suffering for our past mistakes. Worship the lotus feet of Sree Hari, your desire shall be fulfilled."

The poor queen wilted like a tendril in a forest fire. Dhruva was now resolved with unbelievable firmness. He resolved to follow his mother's advice and started for the forest.

Sri Narada hearing of this met Dhruva on the way and warned the child about the dangers ahead. But Dhruva was so firm that in the end the sage ended by helping him. Sri Narada pointed the way to Madhuvana on the bank of the Yamuna as a place dear to the Lord. Then he gave a glorious description of the Lord's form and imparted the holy mantra,

“Om Namo Bhagavathe Narayanaya”

“Om Namo Bhagavate Vasudevaya”

These mantras consisted of twelve syllables.

Then the divine Sage said to Dhruva. “Dhruva, You should bathe three times a day and perform puja with thulasi and other flowers. Constantly remember the fascinating stories of the Lord's Avatars and do your tapas.”

Dhruva heard all this with rapt attention and prostrated before the sage and went towards Madhuvana. He began his great tapas, the like of which has never been heard of, either before or after.

Bathing in the river before dawn, he began meditating on Sri Hari as directed by Sri Narada. His food consisted of only a few fruits in the first month. In the second month, he ate only a little grass; in the third only a few fallen leaves. In the fourth month, he established control over the breath. In the fifth he would stand on only one leg and when he changed his stance to the other leg, the earth began to shake. In the sixth month restraining all outlets, he became one with the universe. Fumes and flames began to rise around him.. The devas in heaven became breathless and

were toppled from their seats. Gasping and breathless and in great fear, they approached Sri Hari the ultimate refuge of all. Sri Hari consoled them.

“Have no fear you gods. The son of Uttanapada is doing intense tapas. I will go and pacify him.”

Dhruva was absorbed in the form of Sri Hari and the whole universe in his heart. He suddenly missed the Lord in his heart. He opened his eyes and saw the same Hari standing before him.

He was dumb for a moment not knowing how to praise the Lord. The lord touched his forehead with his conch and then hymns of praise gushed forth from his lips.

“O! Lord! Having created this universe, you have entered the hearts of everything alive or inert. You make them act with your Maya , keeping them under the illusion that they are independent. Only by your grace can we come out of this illusion. May you be pleased to grant us this grace and the final resting place which is yourself.” Sri Hari granted him sovereignty of the earth and advised him to go back to his father.

After leaving Dhruva in the forest Sri Narada straightaway met king Uttanapada who was by this time bitterly repenting his conduct. The Devarishi Narada assured him that Dhruva would return after the tapas and that he would bring great honour and fame to the royal line.

The months passed soon and messengers announced that Dhruva was returning. The king went in his royal palanquin with the queens to welcome Dhruva. The courtiers, priests and all the royal retinue went with the king to receive Dhruva . The king conducted him to his palace with great love. Dhruva prostrated before Suruchi first and then before his mother and father and they all embraced him with tearful eyes.

There was great rejoicing throughout the kingdom for many days. But a sad event befell before long. It was the practice for princes to go out hunting in those days. Prince Uttama had gone to the forest when as fate would have it a gandharva killed him. Dhruva was infuriated and he entered the forest with a vast army, determined to avenge the death of his brother. Dhruva had acquired divine weapons by his tapas. A fierce battle ensued and the gandharvas were almost exterminated. Kubera, the lord of wealth and one of the guardians of the world was in sore straits. Now Brahma appeared and appealed to Dhruva to show mercy to a beaten enemy. Dhruva obeyed and in return Brahma granted him numerous boons. Poor queen Suruchi in her grief entered the forest and a forest fire killed her.

King Uttanapada became very old. He had conducted many yagnas and had ruled long and well. And like his forefathers he decided to retire to the forest for tapas. So Dhruva was crowned as king. Long were the festivities and it is said that even the gods graced the occasion.

Dhruva was the ideal king; the darling of his subjects. He too conducted many yagnas. There was peace and plenty everywhere. But he too, was subject to time and handing over his kingdom to his son, entered the forest for tapas. In due time a divine chariot appeared. Sri Hari's parshadas gloriously attired and waving lotus flowers beckoned to him to enter the chariot.. Dhruva raised one foot and then hesitated for, he remembered his poor mother. The divine messenger read his thoughts and pointed to another chariot that was already speeding toward heaven.. Suniti was reclining there happily, surrounded and attended by heavenly damsels. Dhruva's attendant showed him his final abode. He became the pole star high above the world and remained there forever. All other stars and galaxies revolved below.

You may see the Dhruva Star even to day as the Pole Star looking down and blessing all mortals.

CHAPTER 4

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Sk 4. Ch 16 - Slokam 16

The Story of Venan

Srimad Bhagavatham is a replica of the world's virtue and vice. It is like day and night, that appear and disappear. After the passing of such a heroic soul like Dhruva, there appeared on the scene, Venan the personification of senseless wickedness. Born in the same line of illustrious kings Venan was the son of king Anga and queen Sumitha. Even as a child, his evil nature showed up. Being quite strong, he would toss his playmates into the swollen river and watch the drowning children with great delight. As he grew up his wickedness also grew. The people became desperate and appealed to the king who in desperation banished him to the forest. King Anga was disconsolate. His heir and only son banished, he too retired to the forest. He did tapas like his forefathers and attained the feet of Lord Hari.

The land was without a ruler and soon the effects were seen. Robbers had a field day, roaming everywhere looting and killing. The rishis who were performing a holy sathra (yagna) on the banks of river Saraswathy were startled to see clouds of dust and smoke raised by the robbers. Now Venan, though he was a ruffian, was a strong ruler and the rishis requested him to resume his kingship. He put down the robbers with a strong hand and there was peace again. But now he was more arrogant. He proclaimed with placards and drum-beat that he alone was to be worshipped and yagnas should be conducted for him only. When the sages remonstrated he fretted and fumed." I am protecting you, so you must worship me. Instead , like an unchaste wife

who worships her paramour, you worship Hari. Out with you!” The Rishis were roused and chanted “Hum!” The Kundalini fire was roused. It rose up their spines and blazed through their eyes and Venan was burned up. The charred body remained. This did not solve their problem. The robbers were again on the rampage.

Venan’s mother, queen Sumitha had somehow kept his body intact. The Rishis approached and took the dead body. Chanting powerful hymns they churned Venan’s thigh. A black dwarf with low forehead, a flat nose and curly hair came out. “Give me a place to live,” he cried and the rishis assigned him the forest. From that day onwards, the dark forests have been the dwelling place of his race. The right arm of the corpse was churned next and a divine form with all the marks of divinity emerged. The conch, the disc and lotus marks were all clear. With further churning a goddess of the same figure emerged. The celestials showered heavenly flowers and garlands and danced overhead to the music of flutes and cymbals. A cool breeze blew wafting divine scent and there was an unutterable peace everywhere. Evidently here was an avatar of Hari . The rishis named them as Prithu and Archis.

Prithu and Archis

They grew up in a moment proving their divine origin and the Rishis crowned them as King and Queen. They were the greatest of all kings and queens. Peace was restored almost immediately, as punishment was quick and stern. The earth which was untilled and barren was tilled by the king himself setting an example. In his golden chariot he went round the earth seven times levelling down the hill tops, levelling up the valleys and throwing bridges across wide rivers. He constructed broad road ways throughout the land. There was prosperity and happiness everywhere .The great poet Sage Veda Vyasa compares the earth

to a great cow and the king to a master milkman, who could milk out anything and every thing needed for man.

The cow, goddess earth, was very generous and various people milked whatever they wanted. The devas milked off nectar. The apsaras, heavenly damsels, got divine perfumes and flowers and gandharvas, got the art of music and dance . The rishis got kusa grass and materials for conducting yagnas The asuras milked off wine that inebriates. The earth was covered with green fields. There was plenty of rain in season and no deluge. And even the sun's heat did not scorch. Robbers did not dare show their faces. Justice was quick and stern and impartial. Heaven had almost come to earth. It was evident that an avatar of Sri Hari was the ruler.

The king, like his forefathers, decided to conduct a grand yagna. It was a grand offering to the gods for the benefits they showered on the people. The gods subsist on their yagna offerings . Grand arrangements were made on the banks of the river Saraswathy. Invitations were sent to all the kings, sages and people in all ranks of life. The priests seated around the holy fire recited Vedic hymns. They poured ghee and oblations in the holy fire and all the devas were personally present to receive the offerings. In this way King Prithu conducted ninety nine grand yagnas and the hundredth was in progress. Now, Indra, the king of gods became jealous, instead of receiving his share with gratitude. He was the only person who had completed hundred yagnas and received the title of Sata Kratu - performer of hundred yagnas - and now here was a rival. He could not brook this and so , disguised as a barbarian he stole the sacrificial horse. As he was speeding across the sky with the stolen horse, the leader of the priests , sage Athri, spotted him and ordered the king's son to pursue him and recover the horse. The prince went in hot pursuit and recovered the horse.

This was repeated two or three times. Finally king Prithu himself took up the pursuit with his divine weapons. He would have killed Indra when Brahma appeared and pleaded with king Prithu as Indra was one of the immortals and deserved to be spared. The magnanimous king obeyed out of respect and in return they showered many gifts on the king, though really he did not need any. Lord Brahma added that Prithu would get all the benefits and credit of completing hundred yagnas.

After a long and glorious reign king Prithu's time was running out. Before final retirement and exit he once more decided to give a final farewell address. He summoned them all in a vast assembly and addressed them thus. "My dear people, Hear me! Providence has made me your king. After collecting taxes, if I do not protect you and punish the evil doers I will be sinning. I will have to suffer the consequences. On the other hand by protecting you and upholding Dharma I will get one sixth of the virtues earned by you. God has ordained thus. Have no doubt. God exists. Otherwise what is the reason for the differences we see? Good begets good and bad begets bad and only God can ordain like this and therefore God exists."

"So, take refuge at his merciful feet; surrender your burdens there and enjoy serene happiness. So while on this earth, serve holy men. An offering made to a sage is an offering made direct to Him. He Himself derives His power by following these sages. Finally, he who has a virtuous character and he who is grateful and kind to old people, is sought after and blessed by prosperity. And may God bless us all. "The vast concourse raised their voice in appreciation. "We are indeed blessed to have such a great king as our ruler. Not only our present position is blessed but our future is also assured. May you live long." Singing the glory of God they dispersed.

Then by chance there arrived the Kumaras. They are the first four ascetics who never grow old. They appeared as five year old children and attended on Lord Hari reciting holy Vedas. They could travel anywhere in all the worlds and wishing to convey their blessings, they appeared before the king. Bowing low the king said, “Great Maharishis, I should not ask if you are well because you are self realized souls always in the presence of Hari. And if you roam about the world, it is only to shower blessings. Still kindly advise how mortals should conduct themselves.” Kumaras replied “The easiest way to reach the Lord is through unstinted love and devotion. Recite his stories and love fellow creatures great and small. This removes from the mind even the last vestiges of passion and illusion. By constant association with the realized saints and carefully avoiding the company of the worldly, the mind is slowly brought under control and it almost vanishes. With the disappearance of this intervening reflecting medium – the mind - you are face to face with the Lord and there is nothing more to be gained.” Their work done, the Kumaras vanished. The king continued to rule, his divine tendencies further strengthened by the Kumaras,. Every action of the king, strengthened the hands of God. Handing over the kingdom to his son, the king retired to the forest for the final penance and exit. The queen Archis also followed him. Reducing his body by severe penance to a shadow of his former royal presence he roused up the Kundalini fire and the body vanished. The queen too entered that fire and as in life, so too in death they rose to the higher world.

Thus ends the immortal story of King Prithu and Queen Archis setting a glorious example to all succeeding kings and fellow mortals.

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Prachinabarhis and His Sons the Prachetases

The princes overcome with awe and wonder prostrated before the Lord and prayed for guidance.

Lord Siva, addressed them thus, “You are blessed princes! The lovers of Sri Hari are dear to me. Brahma, Vishnu and myself are the same. We are only three aspects of the one, universal, Omnipotent power. As Brahma it creates, as Vishnu it sustains and as Siva it destroys and this cycle rotates .So worship without any difference and escape from this cycle of birth and death.” Saying this Sri Siva vanished.

Sri Siva's address to the princes is known as the famous Rudra Geetham. The princes repeated this hymn and immersed in the lake. They did penance for many years until after a very long time Sri Hari himself appeared in a blaze of glory, mounted on Garuda and with goddess Lakshmy by his side. He was flanked

by the heavenly retinue. Sri Hari said, “I am pleased with your tapas and your innate purity and devotion to Sri Rudra. Ask me any boon”.

The princes, thrilled with the vision, with one voice requested, “Grant us O Lord! That wherever we may be , we will have the company of holy sages . Nothing is dearer to us than hearing your glory.” The lord granted their request and added, “He who is kind to all creatures is always blessed. Now depart and do as your father desires.”

Accordingly, they returned to their kingdom and ruled over their vast kingdom as advised by the sages. They married and after a glorious reign, crowned their eldest son Daksha ,who was a re-incarnation of the earlier Daksha, as king. They returned to the forest to do penance and attained freedom.

Meanwhile Sree Narada approached Prachinabarhis. who had become old. and was still performing yajnas.. Sree Narada said, “O King! Enough of these desire motivated sacrifices. Just touch me and look there!” As the king looked he observed all the cattle he had slaughtered in the sacrifices. They were waiting to tear him to pieces when he too would go to the other world. The king was terrified and then Sree Narada told the following story.

The Allegory of King Puranjana

King Puranjana accompanied by his close friend Avijnata wandered in search of an ideal place to build a city. At last he found an ideal place in the southern side of the Himalayas. Every where, there were verdant meadows and murmuring streams that joined the broad river that encircled the city. The city itself was divided into perfect squares with wide roads crossing each other

at right angles. Tall avenue trees like poplars, cedars and deodar lined the streets and birds of brilliant plumage, parrots and peacocks darted about. A pleasant breeze wafted divine fragrance. It had nine gates for exit and entrance.

The king congratulated himself thinking that he had reached the end of his search. Meanwhile his companion had slipped away. Then the king heard a pleasant sound as of anklets near by. A beautiful damsel approached him. She was accompanied by soldiers and a serpent. The king was spell bound to see her beauty. He said, "Are you the goddess Parvathy, Lakshmy or Saraswathy? Or an apsara? It cannot be, because your feet are touching the ground. These grim soldiers following you, are they your guardians? And this coiled serpent with five hoods, is he also your guardian?" The damsel replied, "I am the queen of this city. I am unmarried and I am looking for a protector and husband. Who would not be attracted by such a handsome, noble warrior like you? Let us together enjoy all these gifts of God".

Puranjana who had a natural liking for sensual pleasures, needed no further persuasion and embarked on a life of stark enjoyment. He was so engrossed in sensual pleasures that he forgot everything else. He would talk when she talked, he would sing when she sang and he would dance when she danced. He wept when she would weep, and laughed when she would laugh. He did not trouble himself with the affairs of government and left it entirely to his councillors. He would go out hunting all-day carousing and sleeping all night.

Thus passed months and months lengthened into years, many years. The king, like any one else, was getting old and time brought changes that were not too pleasant. The gandharvas three hundred and sixty in number accompanied by their ladies fair and dark, mounted an attack on Puranjana's city. They were assisted by the

yavanas. A fearful lady called kala kanya(time) who could suck the strength out of one's limbs and Prajivara (disease), her ally , visited Puranjana.. Weakened by a long life of reckless indulgence, deserted by sons and friends he put up a brave resistance. His guards were beaten back; even the guardian serpent could do nothing. The enemy swarmed in like a flood and the king sank back, still thinking of his wife. He could never think about god even in his last moments. As he could think only about his queen always after death he was born as a woman, the daughter of the king of Vidarbha. The child soon grew up as a beautiful princess and in due time was married to Malayadhwaja, the Pandyan king. The sacred river Tambraparni flows through his kingdom. They had five sons and a daughter. Being a saintly king, he entrusted the rule to his sons and retired to the forest accompanied by the queen. Very soon he attained Brahman and the queen was now left with a corpse. She (king Puranjana) wailed her loss and gathered a funeral pyre. She took a dip in the river and was about to jump into the lighted pyre when a sage suddenly appeared and stopped her.

The sage was Avijnata (the unknown) his former boon companion .The two had together roamed over the world He said,“Dear friend, we are two birds . Together we were roaming over the world .. We were sitting on a tree enjoying the calm. Then you the ‘Jeeva’ wanted to taste the pleasures of the world. You plunged into it leaving me alone. Now you have tasted the pleasures. You are not this widowed queen; not even Puranjana. You are my image. Remove the reflecting medium ,mind, and we are one. Come! We shall fly over land and sea and over hill and dale; basking in God's sunshine; enjoying eternal bliss.” And the two, now one, flew away.

As Narada concluded, king Prachina Barhis asked. “Great Sage! I have not fully understood the meaning of the allegory.

Kindly explain more fully .” Then Sri Narada continued, “The city with the nine gates is your body with the nine holes,. two eyes, ears, nostrils, mouth and so on. The queen is none other than “Budhi” i.e. intellect whom every one obeys. The serpent with five hoods is the prana (breath) with five aspects as prana, apana, vyana , udana, and samana. The attacking gandharvas are days and nights. Kala kanya is the terrible maid of time, and Prajivara is disease to which all must succumb and Avijnata is our immortal conscience which we must never neglect. And if you want to end this seemingly endless sequence of birth and death take refuge in Sri Hari. Resort to the company of the saints and enjoy everlasting peace and bliss.”

The king listened to the advice. He gave up all sacrifices and retired to the forest. He went to Kapilasram and doing intense penance, attained Brahman.

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Prachetas

Prachetasa Daksha had many sons. All of them were well versed in the sastras and before settling down, Daksha told them to travel towards the west, so that they could gather more experience and knowledge. They reached the estuary of the Indus with the ocean. Bathing in the Narayana lake they were completely purified and sunk in contemplation. Sri Narada Maharishi appeared before them. He raised a series of paradoxical questions the purport of which was that they were trying to get divine sanction for getting involved in worldly affairs. As a result, the princes renounced all worldly desires for ever and became immersed in contemplation of god and god alone. When their father heard of his sons' fate, he got annoyed and again begot one thousand sons known as Sabalaswars. Like their brothers these boys also travelled west, reached the same lake and met the same Sri Narada who repeated his former success.

Daksha became very angry and said, “You have misled my poor sons from doing their duty to their forefathers, the rishis and gods. So, I curse you to wander perpetually unable to reside in any place for more than a few hours”.

Sri Narada had already known that the princes were all free souls. As for Daksha's curse, he accepted that too as a blessing!

Dakshas' Daughters

To avoid this apparent perversion by Sri Narada Daksha prayed for daughters and he was blessed with sixty daughters all fair and beautiful. He gave ten daughters to Dharma, thirteen to Kashyapa, twenty seven to Tharkshya . The progeny of these peopled the earth. Some were god like, others were demoniac some were vultures , some reptiles and the rest became the various forms of life

Priyavrata

Swayambhuva Manu had two sons. Uttanapada was the elder, whose story has already been told and now we turn to the story of Priyavrata. He had no interest in state affairs and being of an ascetic turn of mind, he was interested in tapas for self realization. Now he was commanded by his father and Brahma (one of the Trinity) himself to return to the kingdom and assume the reins of kingship. Brahma had to plead rather sternly.

“Dear son, none of us is really free to do whatever we like. Neither myself nor Lord Siva nor your father nor any one else is really free. We are all led by the nose as it were by our own karma, directed by Sri Hari. Even a realized saint has to suffer the consequences of his past actions. But he knows that it is all transitory and therefore he is not much affected. A house holder is like a king in a fort. Temperate living helps him to overcome the senses gradually. As a fort helps the king to ward off the enemy, a family life helps the house holder to ward off the attacks of the senses. Therefore return to your kingdom and assume the reins of government and in the end you can resume the saintly life and

come to me.”

Priyavrata obeyed. He was an ideal ruler strong and just. The seven seas, the mountain ridges and the continents were evolved as the king drove around the world in his mighty chariot. People gladly obeyed the law as otherwise punishment would be quick and stern. At the end of his glorious reign, the king woke up as it were, from a dream and resuming his original natural bent of mind, entrusted the vast kingdom to his sons. He gave up everything and after intense penance, attained the feet of Hari.

Agnidhra and Purvajithi

Agnidhra, Priyavrata’s son was now ruler of the entire Jambudvipa. He was young, energetic and well skilled in the arts of war and peace. After some years, desiring an heir, he retired to the forest and prayed to Sri Hari.

The Lord grants whatever a devotee desires. Worldly desires are very readily granted. Soon there was a change in the atmosphere .. A pleasant wind wafted the scents from opening lotus flowers, champak and jasmine. Voluptuous music trilled from the anklets of a dancing apsara coming towards him. The prince was dumbfounded by her celestial beauty and began to talk incoherently. “O beautiful lady! Are you a mortal or a goddess? I will be your slave, I cannot live without you.” The damsel complied smilingly. She was an apsara named Purvajithi sent by Indra for this very purpose. They returned to the capital and to year long celebrations by the people. Agnidhra had nine sons, Nabhi, Kimpurusha, Harivarsha, Ilavita, Ramyaka, Hiranmaya, Kuru, Bhadrasura, and Ketumala. They all had great beauty of form and divine qualities like their mother, Purvajithi. ; her mission done she decided to return to her apsara world. But the king was

loath to leave her and so both went to the apsara world where they live to this day.

The Story Of Nabhi

King Nabhi and his queen Merudevi desirous of ensuring prosperity of his subjects and the glory of his line decided to perform a great yagna. Preparations were made on a very large scale. Only purest of ingredients were used and the priests were self realized sages. They poured offerings into the sacrificial fire reciting vedic mantras in praise of Vishnu (Hari). So great was their sincerity and purity that Sri Hari himself appeared and asked what they wanted. They said. “Great lord! This noble king wants an heir to the throne, who will be the equal of Lord Hari himself .” Sri Hari was amused. Still he said, “How is that possible? O Sages! There is none quite equal to me. Still because of your sincerity and the purity of this king and queen I shall be born as their son, a partial avatar.” The king, queen and the assembled rishis were greatly delighted and all departed awaiting the happy event. In due time the queen gave birth to a beautiful son with all the divine marks of conch, the chakra -wheel - and mace engraved in his palms and feet. The child Rishabha, grew up very rapidly into a tall, powerful and handsome person, the very picture of Sri Hari. The parents, knew that their time was over. They handed over the great kingdom to their divine son and retired to the forest for the final penance. Rishabha married Jayanthi, daughter of Indra and had a hundred sons. Bharata was the eldest who ruled this land , known thereafter as Bharat. Nine of his brothers were known as Navayogis whom we shall see later. The remaining sons had brahmanic qualities and became brahmins.

King Rishabha ,also known as Rishabha Deva, in the course of his travels came to Brahmavarta where the Brahma Rishis were holding a great conference. Finding such a fine responsive

audience Rishabha Deva wanted to address them. His sons were also there among the audience.

Rishaba addressed the assembled sages.

“O Rishis and you my sons, hear me patiently,.

This human body is not for miserable pleasures,.

These pleasures are given even to filth eating worms,

The human body is for divine tapas by which you can be purified

And attain permanent happiness

Service of the great is the gate to freedom eternal,

Company of the lechers is the open door to darkness and hell!

They who love Me are only moderately attached to wife, family and relatives,

Not taking from them anything but the minimum. They come back to Me easily

But they who indulge in pleasures without restraint

And they who commit prohibited acts ,I do not approve of them

As long as they do not want to know the reality

So long their ignorance will continue, and attachment will persist

And the mind carries it over to the next birth.

And even then, because of their forgetfulness they again indulge

In sex and sense pleasures, the home and possessions seem real

The bonds are further strengthened.

The sense of duality is the strongest bond that binds the heart.

When the mind forcibly breaks asunder this bond (the result of

previous actions) then the soul now free from the bond of duality goes back to its source.

From where do we get this required force? From teachers who are realized saints

by implicit obedience to them ,rejecting duality with great fortitude, knowing the sorrow of all,

by a great desire to know the cause of all these and by desireless action,

devoting them to me, delighting in my stories and in the companionship of my devotees,

with enmity towards none ,with equality to all, by engaging in spiritual studies,

getting control over the mind through proper pranayama

by good attention and practice of brahmacharya, (celibacy) by controlled speech without any exaggeration,

and seeing my presence everywhere and by wisdom embellished with knowledge

by practicing yoga with satvic determination . Give up once for all the idea of I and mine.

This idea is the seat and origin of all actions. It is due to ignorance After reaching this stage there is nothing more to get, so retire from everything even yoga.

As there are no bonds any more, you have reached Brahmanandam.

Those who aspire to come to My world and receive My blessings, whether they are parents,

teachers or kings should without anger guide the aspirants to avoid the pitfalls.

Otherwise they fail in their allotted duty.

People blind to their real progress, intensely desirous of amassing riches earn only misery and with it intense enmity and the chimera of happiness.

Which wise man, full of kindness will fail to guide a fool wandering from one foolishness to another? Should not one, who is blessed by sight, guide a blind man who has lost his way?

He is not a teacher, he is not a relative,
He is not a father and she is not a mother,
And that god is no god nor that husband a true one,
Who does not release one from approaching death.

This body is difficult to understand
But my heart is full of sathvic virtues and dharma,
And I have put adharma far behind,
Hence the wise ones call me Rishabha.

You are all born, out of my heart
Therefore all of you deserve to follow,
And obey implicitly your eldest brother Bharata,
That way, you will be serving me and the people.

Among creation you have immovable things like stones,
Then come tanks and rivers, then trees and reptiles,
Then human beings, and then gandharvas,
And then yakshas and beyond them gods.

And there is Indra, chief of gods, above him Daksha, the sons of Brahma,

And Lord Siva, part of me, I follow the realized sages and Brahmins,

These Brahmins are above every one else and the offerings made to them,

Is superior even to offerings in the fire made to me.

The Vedas are my body, the Brahmins preserve it by study, by restraint of mind and body, by following the truth, by penance and by fortitude

Even from me, the dispenser of all blessings and final salvation,

These wandering sages desire nothing but continuous devotion.

My sons! Worship not only Brahmins, worship all living creatures

And even inanimate nature, because I abide everywhere.

That is real worship, let all your actions, and words be dedicated to Me,

and only this dedication will help you to escape from the meshes of death.

Thus advising his sons , who were by nature already saintly, King Rishabha handed over the reins of government to Bharata and taking nothing with him, left for the forest, completely alone.

He travelled over hill and dale, not caring for the big mosquitoes or even wild animals. He subsisted on wild fruits and roots, making no attempt to get food, slaking his thirst from the mountain streams, sometimes lying down, and not even taking a bath. But, strange to say a sweet fragrance like that of musk spread all over the place. Various sidhis such as distant vision, entering another body, transporting oneself to any place, reading another's thoughts and the like now presented themselves before Rishabha willing to obey him but Rishabha declined. Instead he

continued to wander in the southern regions of coorg.

Rishabha had already become free. The body alone was moving about and it was consumed in a moment by a forest fire. O King! This omnipresent Lord was the guide, friend, charioteer, and even the servant of your ancestors the Pandavas. A man can wish for nothing more

Bharata would wake up much before sunrise and have a dip in the river . With water dripping from his locks, dress, he would face the rising sun as the manifestation of God and offer prayers. His food consisted of ripe fruits lying on the ground and the tender leaves. The rest of the time was spent in contemplation so deep, that his eyes became wet with tears while an intense bliss filled his heart. One morning as usual, he had just finished his bath, when he saw a full grown female deer on the other shore. She was big with child. Suddenly there was the terrific roar of a lion. The deer made a tremendous leap to cross the river and as she was half way over the river the fawn dropped from her womb and the swift current was bearing it away. The deer itself reached the opposite bank but was so much exhausted that it fell down dead. The swift current carried the fawn to the very spot, where

Bharata was standing. As he had a merciful heart , Bharata took it up as a gift of god, wrapped it up in his own cloak with great tenderness and took it to his ashram.

Bharata, who had given up even an empire, was now attracted by the fawn.

He began to gather tender leaves and flowers for the little deer. He daily watched it growing up with growing affection within his heart. He took it out daily for a morning walk and never left it alone for fear of wolves and other wild animals. Whenever he had to leave it alone in the ashram for taking his bath and gathering fruits he would think, “O! What will happen to my darling! O Lord! Thou who seeth everything, everywhere, kindly protect my darling.” When Bharatha returned, the fawn would jump about him gently rubbing its sprouting horns against Bharata’s body. Thus Bharatha was engrossed night and day in looking after the fawn.. He even forgot the routine daily worship and contemplation. It was “The fawn O! my pretty fawn!“, all the time.

Thus days passed in complete oblivion of all his duties, even his daily worship. But time and tide wait for no one and Bharata was facing death. Even in this extremity his thoughts were for the deer.” What will happen to my darling deer?” Thinking thus he breathed his last.

Now whatever a man thinks of at the last moment, that, he becomes! And Bharata was born as a deer some distance away. Because of its meritorious actions in its previous life, the deer remembered his previous life and determined not to commit the same folly. So, the little deer repaired to Pulahasramam, heard the discourses of the rishis, and lived on tender leaves and the prasadam – food offered to gods - given by the rishis who treated it as an inmate. The deer grew old and when its time arrived thinking of God all the while expired, casting off its body in the river.

Bharata The Brahmin

There was at that time a pious brahmin of the Angiras gothra, known for his learning and austerity. He had a large family of sons and one daughter. Bharata the deer was born to the second wife of this Angiras brahmin. Bharata knew all about his previous births because of the great tapas and austerities he had undergone and was now determined to avoid all contacts. To achieve this, he pretended to be a hopeless dunce. When addressed by others he would reply irrelevant answers, or pretended not to hear at all. In spite of this, his father invested him with the sacred thread and tried his best to teach him the holy manthra Gayathri without success. In due course the father expired and Bharata's mother accompanied him performing sathi.

To do them justice, the brothers tried to bring him up but without success. Bharata was left to look after the fields and work in them, as an ordinary labourer. Even this he would do indifferently. He would go on digging deeper and deeper or levelling up endlessly. As wages he would be given stale bread, which he ate with great glee. He would sleep in the open watching the corn and the wonder of it was that though he would not drive away the birds or rodents and other pests, there was always a bumper harvest.

Now, about this time, there was a fierce brigand, spreading terror and devastation. He had no children and to please the demons he determined to perform a human sacrifice. His followers captured some poor fellow for this purpose. This poor man had escaped from custody and the brigand's followers were now searching for a proxy. And as fate would have it they came upon poor Bharata in the fields. The ruffians pounced upon him, bound his hands and feet and led him to their chief. The chief and the sacrificing priest were more than pleased to see the young, robust victim. Surely Bhadrakali would be immensely pleased. The

robbers and their chief gathered round the image of the goddess and began to recite the final verses.

All this time Bharata was quite indifferent completely absorbed in the infinite, enjoying infinite bliss. The priest took up the sword and danced around and was about to bring it down on Bharata's neck. With a great roar Badrakali sprang out of the image snatched the sword from the priest's hand and cut off his head. Not satisfied, the goddess with her minions cut off the heads of all the ruffians and began to play football with their heads. Bharata watched this gory game with the same serenity . When the game was over the goddess and her attendants vanished, thereby teaching the world that such would be the fate of those who would harm Lord's devotees.

Bharata and Rahugana

Rahugana was the king of the Soaviras (Sind). He was past middle age and thought that the time was ripe to know more about the mysteries of life. With this end he undertook a pilgrimage to the north where perchance he might meet some great yogi. He was travelling rather in pomp, in a palanquin accompanied by body guards. They were looking for a good palanquin bearer and as luck would have it, saw Bharata by the banks of the river Ikshumathy. Here was a young athletic figure and they made the unresisting brahmin a palanquin bearer. The fresh recruit had a peculiar habit. He was very careful to avoid treading on worms and ants and always looked yards ahead and would jump aside if there was any insect and the palanquin would also be jerked. Rahugana was jolted badly and he got annoyed. He shouted angrily, "Ho! Ho! Bearers! Be careful." The bearers humbly replied, "Sire, it is the new recruit. He is often jumping about. It is very difficult to work with him."

Rahugana looked at the new recruit; with some anger and sarcasm he observed “Ho! Ho! Bearer! You are old and weak! Or I could teach you a lesson”.

The bearer replied, “Sir, who is master and who is servant? Both the terms are myths. If you refer to this body it is not true. It is perishable and will return to the elements from which it is made. If you refer to the soul, it is immortal, part of the universal soul.”

Rahugana looked more carefully and observed the sacred thread clinging on the body of the bearer. He sprang down and bowing low said, “Pardon! Pardon! Holy Brahmin! You may be the sage I am searching for. Tell me further.”

Bharata continued. “In between the body and the soul there is the powerful mind, - a combination of the three gunas - a product of Maya. The mind works through the senses and it is at the root of all the differences that you see. No amount of learning or austerity will help. Get hold of the feet of a great guru and he will show the way. By the lord’s maya the jiva is thrown into a forest where six dacoits live- desire, anger, greed, delusion, pride and jealousy are their names. They devour the soul as wolves tear down a sheep. Tormented with thirst the tired traveller approaches grass covered wells without water. In life don’t we approach pitiless people for help? The hungry traveller gets only poisonous fruits. At last the traveller thinks he has reached shelter but that proves to be a dream city. The traveller and his partner sit like two monkeys on the branch of a tree grinning at each other and think that this is felicity. Panting for water, he sees it at a distance. But when he goes near it vanishes. It was a mirage. Sometimes for the sake of little money he quarrels bitterly with fellow travellers and they become mortal enemies. When in need of a little help he gets contempt and disgrace. His friends prove to be jackals and vultures. This is the Bhava adavi or the worldly forest. Only His grace can help you to cross this.”

“O! Master! How kind you are! You are like all followers of Hari. They save not only themselves but also others. I bow to you, I bow to every one!” Thus worshipped by Rahugana, the great sage Bharata calm and full like the great ocean, went on his way.

CHAPTER 8

ॐ नमो भगवते वासुदेवाय ।
ॐ नमो भगवते वासुदेवाय ।

Sk 6. Ch 2 - Slokam 15

Ajamilā

The successors of Bharata were all worthy of their forefather. Sri Suka now digresses for some time to give a detailed description of this earth and the universe. Bharatavarsha is ringed by mountain ranges in concentric rings and in between there are oceans of lime, milk and nectar . The rings of mountains rise higher and higher and from there originate great rivers. Different people of various hues and stature, gods and demigods; some golden and others dark or fair came to exist there . They enjoyed heavenly pleasures without disease or old age and yet longed to be born in Bharatavarsha (our country), because this is the karma bhumi where you can earn merit through actions and attain the region from which you need not return. Then Suka Brahman gives fascinating description of the abode of Ananta, the serpent, of Indra, lord of the gods. Finally he gives a gruesome picture of hell where sinners are sent to be punished for their sins. Now there are as many types of hells as there are sins. Burning coals are forced down the throats of those who habitually lie. Those who have evicted their poor relatives through false documents are made to run through sharp blades of leaves - that look like pointed lances - that cut their skin. A little further off, there is a cauldron of boiling oil and some screaming wretches are thrown into it. They had done the same thing while alive - frying live things like chicken. Tortured sinners' groans came from some other quarters.

Parikshit was a bold man; still he was thoroughly frightened. However Sri Suka comforted him “O King! The punishments you have seen are terrible but they can be averted. If a sinner is really

repentant and cries “‘Om Namō Narayanaya’, gods and angels will appear, and putting to flight the devils , will escort the repentant man to Gods’ presence. So take heart, and listen to the famous story of Ajamila”.

The Story of Ajamila

In the city of Kanyakubj there was an old sinner named Ajamila. A hunter and robber by turns he was eighty-eight years old and was now on his deathbed. The messengers of Yama, , the god of death ,appeared with fearful countenances with ropes in hand . They were wresting the soul from his heart when Ajamila in a quavering voice called for his youngest son who was named Narayana. “O! Narayana! Narayana!” Then a miracle happened! A group of Vishnu Parshadas ,attendants of Sri Vishnu, immediately appeared from no where. They were all brilliantly clad. All were youthful and four armed like Sri Hari himself. They had lotus like eyes exuding energy. They scattered the messengers of Yama. Yama’s messengers enquired in great fear. “Who are you that prevent us from our duty. Are you gods? We have been ordered by our master Lord Yama to bring this old sinner to Samyamani where he will be punished in the purgatories and purified”.

The angels, were curious and asked what he had done. Yama’s minions replied.“Ajamila has grievously strayed from Dharma. He was born to a pious father, well versed in all the shastras and married to a virtuous wife. He lead an ideal life. One day he went to the forest as usual and saw a hunter and his mistress singing lewd songs and engaged in shameless amorous play. Their different postures entwined together affected his mind badly. All the training and asceticism of the young brahmin were vain, his heart was shaken by cupid. He left his aged parents and virtuous

wife, squandered all his wealth for a shameless woman and took to brigandage and hunting for a livelihood. We are taking him to hell by our master's orders."

The angels replied." You say, you are the guardians of Dharma! It is a pity you have not fully understood the law of Dharma which is as follows. However much a man has sinned, if at the last moment of death he utters the four syllabled words NA-RA-YA-NA he is completely purified. No matter if he says it in fun, in mockery or accidentally , he is completely absolved. You may say that he was only calling his son. That does not matter."

Yama's followers were in doubt and they returned to their master. The angels too vanished . Ajamila woke up as from a dream. But it was no dream. He could distinctly recall every word. "Alas ! What a fool I have been! Leaving my destitute old parents and my chaste virtuous wife I committed all kinds of ugly acts with a drunken bawd. Please Lord, have mercy on me!" Thoroughly repentant, he spent the few remaining days of his life on the banks of the Ganges and when at last his last day came, he saw the same heavenly messengers. He was given a new heavenly body and the Lord's messengers escorted him to Vaikunta the abode of Sri Hari.

Yama Raja's messengers returned to Samyamani, and said, "O! Master! How many judges are there? By your order, we went to earth to fetch the sinner Ajamila and had tied even his hands and feet. Then we were thrown back by the superior energy of a group of glittering angels. They said that by uttering the word "Narayana" Ajamila was purified. Pray, is that the law?"

The stern lawgiver closed his eyes in contemplation and bowing to Sri Hari in his heart, said, "Lord Hari is above us all. He permeates everything moving and unmoving like the warp and woof of a cloth. Myself, Indra, all the chief gods and even the

sages freed from the three gunas are led like oxen by the nose strings held by the driver. We twelve - myself ,Brahma, Sri Narada, Siva, Kumara, Kapila, Manu, Prahlada, Janaka, Bhishma, Bali and Sri Suka - know the law, the great Dharma and therefore we have become immortal. Uttering the name of the Lord “Narayana” at the last moment absolves one of all sins and even the tendency to commit sin is destroyed. All other forms of worship and remedies remove only past sins but not the tendency to commit them. The word “Narayana” though uttered chokingly, in a faltering voice purifies one forever and ushers him into the kingdom of God forever.”

And Yama Raja humbly added, “May the great Lord Hari forgive me for this one error.” And turning to his followers he added, “My dear followers, do not even approach hereafter any dying person who is uttering the holy name Hari or Narayana. Give them a wide berth. Do not be aghast. There is plenty of work for you. If any one moves about a place of worship without bowing his head or who has never uttered the name of God, bring that rascal here binding his hands and feet and then do your assigned work. OM! NARAYANA! NARAYANA”.

Indra’s Disrespect of Guru

Indra, Lord of the gods was holding court. He was seated on a glittering throne, with full regal paraphernalia, surrounded by the lesser gods singing his glory. The king of the gods was elated by his own greatness, when there entered his old Guru, the venerable Brihaspati, tottering with age . Indra did not rise from his seat. Though he saw the sage enter, he pretended not to see and the sage quietly retreated. Indra immediately realized his mistake and starting up in alarm, hastened after the Guru, but

could not find him. By his yogic powers the sage had made himself invisible.

The absence of the guru soon began to be felt. The enemies of the gods, the asuras were now emboldened and with the help of their guru, the great Sukracharya, made inroads even into heaven. They put to flight the gods and usurped their places. Indra now bitterly repented and putting himself at the head of the gods approached Lord Brahma. The Lord roundly reprimanded the deputation.

“Proud of your position and prosperity, you have insulted a most learned Brahmin, the master of all secrets. See the consequence. You had to flee from your palaces and your enemies who deeply respect and honour their acharya have driven you out. Your times are bad now, wait for better days. But you must have a guru, a worthy substitute. Viswarupa, the son of Thwashta, is a very great sage and he may accept your request and guide you back to your former glory. However, there is a slight flaw in this arrangement. This sage Viswarupa is related through his mother to the asuras. But you need have no qualms. A learned scholar will not refuse to instruct an eager student.” The devas were clever in arguing. Humbly approaching Viswarupa they said, “Great sage! We request you to become our acharya. As a sister is the personification of kindness, the mother the symbol of earth’s patience and father the symbol of lord Brahma himself, the acharya is our protector and guide. Kindly lead us the right way, so we can regain our lost glory”.

Viswarupa was young and deeply learned but reluctant. Still, out of deep respect for the elders he agreed and became the acharya of the devas. Viswarupa then brought out a famous incantation known as Narayana Kavacham. Reciting this mantram with great faith Indra and the devas became invincible and regained all their glory.

Narayana Kavacham

Viswarupa taught.” After washing hands and feet and performing achamanam pray as follows. May lord Hari with all his weapons protect me from all evils. May the lord in the form of the fish protect me in water and may the lord as Vamana protect me from all dangers on land. May The lord as Narasimha guard me from all fierce enemies. May lord Kapila save me from bondage of action. May the lord in the forms of his various avatars protect me from every conceivable evil. May the divine chakra burn up every obstruction.” The above is only the gist of the full mantra. Reciting the full mantra Indra and the devas became irresistible and occupied their own former abodes.

Viswarupa had three heads. With one he drank soma , with the second he drank sura or wine , and with the third he consumed rice. He performed yagnas for Indra with great devotion and proffered offerings into the sacrificial fire liberally for the benefit of the gods. But moved by affection for his relatives through his mother he unobtrusively offered offerings for asuras also. Indra was incensed and cut off the heads of Viswarupa. One of the heads became the black cock, another became the sparrow and the third became a partridge. As a result of killing a brahmin saint Indra incurred the sin of Brahmahathya. He divided it among earth water, trees and women. When old Thwashta heard of the sad end of his young son, he decided to take revenge. He performed a powerful hellish homa and reciting the powerful spell, poured the oblation into the Dakshinagni. A huge form Vritra came out. Dark like the winter cloud with eyes shooting fire and tongue lolling out, he looked like death .. Wielding a huge trident from which lightning flashed, he fell upon the devas and began to gobble them up. The gods were no cowards but what could they do against such, an enemy? They made a fervent appeal to Sree Hari. They

prayed recalling with gratitude how as a giant fish he had saved them from the flood and all the previous occasions when he had come to their help. Sri Hari revealed Himself.

“I am pleased with your repentance. Approach Dadichi Maharishi. He is an old Brahmajnani (knower of Brahman) whose bones have hardened through tapas and request him to give you his back bone out of which a weapon can be fashioned to kill this asura.”

The Strange Request of Devas to Dadichi

The devas approached Dadichi Maharshi with their strange request. “Great Sire,” the devas said, “Be pleased to give us your bones to overcome our enemy. There is nothing that great sages like you will not give to relieve the miseries of helpless people,” Dadichi the knower of Brahman was amused. He said, “If I give my backbone I shall surely die, And which man is not afraid of death?” The devas were abashed. Still they continued, “We know your great power and attainments. No one else can help us.” The great rishi agreed and relaxed into eternal Samadhi. The devas reverently took his bones and fashioned a terrible weapon the Vajrayudham out of it. Indra took it up with confidence and faced the enemy.

The Battle Between Indra and Vritra

All the asuras now rallied under Vritra. The battle raged for days but at last the asuras were overpowered and began to flee. Vritra stopped them, and commanded, “Do not fly like cowards. Be heroes, follow me.”

With his flaming trident in one hand and a mace in the other Vritra strode forward. He smashed the enemy in dozens and impaled scores in his trident. The devas were beaten back. The

opponents were now face to face. Indra was seated on his white elephant. As usual verbal recriminations preceded. Vritra said.” By god’s grace you are in my power now. You killed your preceptor, insulted your guru, you are the slave of your senses and have committed many shameful acts.” Saying so he struck a terrible blow. The white elephant was beaten down and Vritra swallowed Indra. The celestials and sages who were watching the fight from above groaned with fear.” Only Lord Hari can save Indra now!”

Indra with his divine weapon slashed his way out. Vritra now went berserk. His form was immense, his mouth bigger than a cavern and he gobbled up all the devas he could lay hands upon. But Indra rallied and cut off his right arm. Then Vritra roared with pain but continued the havoc with his left arm and addressed Indra thus.

“ I will go back happy like an eaglet waiting for its mother eagle; like a calf running to its mother cow. Like a maiden waiting for her absent lover I am waiting to be united to my lord. Now strike my friend and gain what you want. I go back gladly to my lord.”

And those watching outside saw a dazzling light, rising up and moving across the sky until it merged with the infinite.

How Indra Was Saved From The Sin Of Brahmahatya

The celestials and sages now relieved from Vritra’s oppression, returned to their respective abodes. But Indra was unwell and the sages now performed a great yagna, “The Rajasuya”. Brahmahatya or the sin of killing a brahmin now took the form of an old hag with dishevelled hair, fierce eyes and exuding a nasty odour pursued Indra. He fled over the three worlds and at last took refuge in the fiber of lotus flower in the Manasa - saras.

The devas wanted a substitute ruler to rule over them and lead them in battle against the asuras. There was a powerful king named Nahusha. He agreed to rule over them and was installed as the temporary Indra. He ruled well, winning victories against the asuras. But this Nahusha had an evil streak in his character. He insisted that the chaste Indrani (queen of Indra) should be his partner. The poor queen was in a fix. But she was clever and thought of a stratagem. She told Nahusha to come in a palanquin borne by the great seven sages. The foolish Nahusha agreed and came riding in a palanquin borne by the seven sages. Agastya one of the bearers, was of short stature and the progress of the palanquin was rather slow. The substitute Indra was impatient. He cried “Sarpa, Sarpa” – meaning “Quick Quick” and prodded the great sage Agastya with his feet. The all powerful sage became angry and said. “You fool! Since you have said ‘Sarpa, Sarpa’ you will become a serpent.” At once Nahusha fell off the palanquin becoming a huge serpent in the process. After aeons of existence as serpent Nahusha got his release in Dwapara Yuga as will be told later

In the land of the Surasenas, there was once a great emperor Chitraketu by name. He was the overlord, getting tribute from subordinate kings , enjoying all the pleasures of life. He was in full vigour of life and had more than a thousand wives, all as fair as the dawn and yet Chitraketu was unhappy. He had no son. Just then, by chance, the great sage Angiras came to visit him. The emperor immediately rose and received the sage with the greatest respect. The all knowing sage smilingly addressed the king. “O! King! You are ruling over your subjects with great justice and your subjects are happy and contented and yet some discontent is clouding your face” “What shall I say to thee who knowest all! Yet I shall obey your command” The king continued “I have no son to continue the line. Who will protect my poor subjects and

who will repay our debt to our forefathers and gods by performing the annual Sradhas and daily poojas I will be punished and banished to the nether world like a felon for failure in my duties” The poor king could proceed no further.

The kind hearted sage gently said “Take heart, great king. I shall perform a great yagna for the Sun god and you will have a son.” Angiras immediately performed a sacrifice to the Sun god and gave the remnants as prasada to the king who in turn gave it to his eldest queen Kritadyuti who partook of it with great devotion. Soon she became pregnant and in due time gave birth to a fine son. There were great rejoicings, throughout the land. The baby grew up a fine boy bringing joy to whoever looked on him. He was the darling of the step mothers and nurses and the courtiers. The king spent most of his time fondling his son and attending to his mother and unfortunately he began to neglect his other wives. They wailed “Alas how unfortunate are we childless and neglected. Our lot is worse than that of the female servants” As their misery grew they lost their reason and poisoned the child. The poor queen Kritadyuti thought the child was sleeping and engaged herself in some household work. Time passed, the child did not wake up and the queen told an old nurse to wake it up. The old nurse gently approached the child. Its eyes were fixed; there was no breath; she fell down with a cry. The queen now came near and finding the child was dead, she uttered a wild cry and fell down in a swoon. The servants ran here and there and the king beat his breast wailing “Alas! What sin have I committed that I am suffering thus. Great God! Take us also. We cannot bear this loss.”

Just then old Angiras Maharishi arrived along with Sri Narada. “Grieve not O! King! Nothing of this world is real It is all dream-land Your palace, kingdom, your armies will all disappear into the womb of nature and your own body will become a handful of dust or ashes. I would have told you all this when we first met

but your desire for a son was so great that you could not receive any message” Sri Narada now thought of a more effective method than just advice. Facing the dead body of the child he said “Rise again O! Jiva and gladden the hearts of all these people. Enjoy your throne . Your father and mother are grieving. Gladden their hearts again.” To the intense astonishment of all, the Jiva said “Pray which father and mother am I to choose? I have so many fathers and mothers and relatives through my various births in different wombs, human, divine quadrupeds and even reptiles. According to one’s actions, a person is born. Escape from this coil by selfless service to all fellow beings” Saying this the soul again left the child Chitraketu and others now convinced of the unreality of the body and the reality of the soul were more or less calmed took their bath in the river and performed the funeral rites. Even the cruel step mothers repented for their cruel action. Realized that they were just pawns in the game of fate, and becoming really sorry, had a peaceful end. Sri Narada went one step more. It is the nature of saints to shower blessings wherever they go. He decided to teach Chitraketu how to overcome maya , illusion , by worshiping Bhagavan Sankarshana (Adisesha) But before that he had to be taught something important. Sri Narada taught him how to recognize the Lord in various aspects such as budhi (Intellect) mind , feelings , in twelve divine mantras. As the mind became free, he could travel anywhere and reached Adisesha’s abode. He was very fair, clad in blue silk, adorned with rare gold ornaments and jewels such as warriors wear and his eyes were long and rather reddish. He was surrounded by groups of immortals. At this grand sight out of sheer devotion tears welled up in Chitraketu’s eyes. He did not know what to ask for, as he wanted nothing. Still the Lord blessed him as the supreme master of the Bhajan form of worship (musical recital of gods’ actions).

Chitraketu roamed over the spheres with his band of musicians blessing bhajan parties with their presence. In the course of his wanderings the party happened to pass by Mount Kailas and wishing to pay homage to Lord Siva, they alighted near the Ashram. Lord Siva with Sri Parvathy seated on his lap and embracing her with one hand was expounding the meaning of the Vedas to the assembled sages.

Chitraketu laughed loudly. “The great exemplar who should set an example is embracing Sri Parvathy in public. Even ignorant persons do so only in privacy” Lord Siva only smiled and did not react. But Sri Parvathy was enraged “Who is this person who has dared to insult Lord Siva, when venerable sages and even Hari and Brahma see nothing wrong” The Devi continued “You do not deserve to be the minstrel of God. You have too much of Rajasic guna. I curse you to be born as an asura” Though Chitraketu could curse in return, he did not do so. He meekly accepted the curse and was born as Vritra in the Homam that was being performed by Thwasta.

Shri Siva observed , “You see my dear Parvathy the greatness of the devotees of Hari. They are free from anger and all such maladies” Such was Vritra’s origin. No wonder he regained his former status after a comparative short relapse.

CHAPTER 9

काण्वेज देवेज शिवेयस देवेपेज सेवेनदेवते | >
०१२५४ मेवतेन ०१५५ देवेदेवेनदेवेपेज >>

Sk 7. Ch6 - Slokam 1

Prahlada

We have now to look back a little.

Hiranyakasipu's tapas lasted for a long time. It was an asuric form of tapas , cutting of pieces of flesh from the body and casting it in the sacrificial fire. When there was nothing more to cut off he was about to cast himself in the fire when Lord Brahma appeared "My son I am pleased with your tapas. What do you wish?". "I wish immunity from death" Brahma replied "Nay, that is not possible. It is not in my power to give that". "Then" said Hiranyakasipu "grant me invulnerability from all weapons, from beasts and men. I should not be killed either in day time or night" Lord Brahma said "Be it so" and touched his wasted body and Hiranyakasipu arose, his body shining like molten gold and hard as diamond. When Hiranyakasipu had left his palace years ago, he had left his pregnant wife Kayatu, unprotected. Indra, his arch enemy, pounced upon the poor lady, took her captive and was leading her to prison when Sri Narada stopped him enroute. Indra protested "Great Sire, this lady will have a son and he will be as powerful as his father. So I am going to destroy it before it is born". "You fool!" the sage retorted. "You should not harm a pregnant lady and moreover the child in the womb will be the foremost devotee of Hari". Indra at once agreed to release the queen. He circum-ambulated her thrice and bowed and returned to his abode. Sri Narada took the lady under his charge, gave her shelter and all comfort in his ashram. The queen herself kept the ashram clean, gathered flowers and fruits for the sages daily rituals.

And during leisure Sri Narada told the fascinating stories of Lord Hari, of how he is the friend of the poor and oppressed and punishes the evil doers. Even in the womb, the child was listening avidly and after he was born, the maharishi took him under his special tutelage and needless to say he became a peerless devotee.

Hiranyakasipu ruled over the whole universe. In his palace of many spacious halls the walls were smooth as a mirror; the pillars shone with precious stones, the devas were in humble attendance. Agni cooked his food and the wind god Vayu swept the courtyard clean and goddess earth gave always bumper crops without ploughing. The gandharvas (demy gods) were constantly singing his praise. The apsaras (nymphs) were dancing without pause and the monarchs of the world regularly brought their tributes. Even the offerings poured into the sacrificial fires by the sages were forcibly diverted to him. It was continuous enjoyment all the time and yet the asura was not satisfied. It was adharma (unrighteous conduct) all along the line. Nobody should worship Hari. Instead they could worship him “OM! Namō Narayanaya” was neatly replaced with “OM! Namō Hiranyaya” Ages passed. The gods were famished as good men could not perform any rituals or sacrifices. The gods groaned. They were reaching the limit, Sri Hari consoled them “The end is near. I am working through my child Prahlada”.

Prahlada's Childhood

Hiranyakasipu had four sons of whom Prahlada was the greatest, the master of all the greatest qualities that waited upon him as if he was their master. A lover of saintly people, and of gentle conduct he was like a father to people in distress and a brother to all living creatures. He looked on his teachers as gods and was entirely devoid of egoism. He saw the world as unreal

and phantom like. In short his virtues were countless like God's and saints do not tire of recounting them in the assemblies of good people even as they do not tire of recounting the attributes of Hari himself. Sometime, tears welled up in his eyes; sometimes he laughed. The reason for all this extra ordinary behaviour was his inborn devotion to Hari. In short, he was possessed by Hari! And Hiranyakasipu hated this son! It happened thus.

One day, the Asura took his little son on his lap and asked "Dear Fellow! What is the best thing a person can do?" The child immediately replied "In this troubled world where people are torn with thoughts of mine and thine, they should leave their houses which are like hidden wells and run to the forests where they may take refuge in Hari"

The Asura's brows darkened "My enemy or his agents have corrupted my poor son's mind. I must entrust him to proper teachers for his education". He summoned Chandamarkas the two sons of Sukracharya and commanded them to undertake his education in the proper way. They took the child to their hermitage and taught him all the usual sastras which he mastered with great ease. But he was firm in his devotion to Sri Hari. He is the cause of everything; He is everything. The child affirmed. The teachers were in a fix "How did you get this idea? was it imparted to you or is it your own?"

Prahlada replied "The wrong notion that this is mine, that is yours is created by Sri Hari's maya. I bow to Sri Hari. When Sri Hari favours you, this beastly idea "I am one, he is another" gets cracked. Even gods are not free from this duality. Even sages who are on the trail miss their way some time. I am aware of this danger and therefore I am firm in my devotion to Hari". The tutors were disheartened "This boy is like a thorny bush among the mighty sandalwood trees, the asuras". They then took him to his mother; she bathed and adorned him in a fitting manner and led him to his

father. Embracing him warmly the Asura spoke tenderly “Prahlada, my darling, tell me the essence of what you have learned from your tutors” and Prahlada gently began “Hearing stories about Sri Hari, singing bhajans about him, remembering and serving him, offering flowers and worshipping, serving him implicitly by friendship and offering yourself completely – these are the nine forms of devotion and if a man follows these he has learned his lessons properly”. Blind with anger Hiranyakasipu turned on the trembling tutors “How is this? You traitors have misinformed my son”

Those poor fellows shaking with fear moaned “It was not done by us or by any other. This he has learned by himself. Please wait till your guru, our father returns. He will surely find some way”.

Turning to his son the Asura thundered “How did you get this pernicious idea in your mind?”. Gently Prahlada replied “Devotion to Lord Krishna will not come to those who are devoted to their own families with uncontrolled senses like unbridled beasts .They do not understand their own real interest . People who are led by outward appearances follow others equally blind , like beasts following other beasts led by the nose string. Their mind will not turn to the worship of Sri Hari until they follow the footsteps of the sages and are hallowed by the dust of their feet. As a magnet attracts iron Sri Hari attracts me.”

The Asura threw down the boy and roared “He is an enemy. He has forgotten how my brother was treacherously killed and does not want to avenge it. If a limb of ones own body is diseased it should be amputated. Take him away, poison him, and throw him down the cliff” The demoniac attendants needed no further persuasion. They tried all these tricks and many more. As the child was merged in Hari, all their efforts were vain. And the

emperor of the three worlds became really anxious. He was afraid.

Chandamarkas, the tutors consoled the Asura “Bind the child with Varunapasa, so he will not run away and let us await the return of our father who will certainly find out some way.” And they continued with their own interpretation of Dharma, Artha and Kama, carefully omitting the fourth Purushartha of Moksha. Prahlada was an apt student. When the tutors retired for some other work, Prahlada would gather his co disciples around and out of his great kindness addressed them “Dear friends, hear me carefully. Even from childhood a wise man should hear his duty as expounded in the Bhagavatham. Do not hanker after sensual pleasures. It is cheap. Available without effort even for animals. Life is short. At the most a hundred years. Half of it is lost in sleep; a good part as a child and yet another big part as a mature adult and householder and the final part in dottering old age and regrets. All are bound firmly by family affection and very few want even to escape; wealth is even dearer than life as proved by the soldier, the trader and thief. And who wants to leave his wife; the fond memories and secret pleasures? And who wants to forget the recollections of his children or their artless talk; who wants to forget the grown up sons and daughters either; or their progeny or ones own old helpless parents; and who wants to leave his own comfortable home and hard earned wealth. It is not a question of learning. Even learned men are powerless to get over the duality of mine and thine and become the love pets of the other sex even when inexorable death approaches. Therefore dear friends, give up the company of sensual fools and worship the foremost and most ancient of all the gods Sri Narayana, the very image of final release. And it is not at all difficult to find him, as he is present everywhere, in everything and in yourself. He is the seer and the seen; He can be felt as spontaneous, intense pleasure without any reason and the lesson we should learn from all these, is - Be kind

to all creatures at all times and under all circumstances so that He may be pleased.

Prahlada told the eager students how he had learned from Sree Narada Maharishi. How the body is ephemeral, changing every moment, unreal while the soul is eternal, a part of Sri Narayana himself. How the differences are unreal and vanish like smoke when the truth is realized. And there are, a thousand ways of reaching this truth. The easiest and most pleasant way is through devotion, through bhajans (Psalms) and kind hearted service. He is in all. So you are serving God when you are serving the poor. So, cultivate sat sangh (company of the godly). Finally, dear friends , it is not birth as a high born brahmin or god or sage that matters. Poems or songs or vast learning do not matter, giving alms or austerity and penance are not as dear to Sri Hari as disinterested devotion. The rest is only pretense. And all are eligible, asuras, yakshas, women, birds, beasts, reptiles, All, All are eligible. In fact, they have attained salvation. This is the truth”

His co-disciples all asura boys listened attentively and began to sing hymns and danced round Prahlada to the great consternation of the tutors. On hearing about the strange turn of events , Hiranyakasipu became blind with fury and grasping a sword rushed towards his son “You idiot! Where is the source of your strength? I will finish both of you at once!” and Prahlada replied “Oh! King! Not only mine but yours and of every creature, Sri Hari is the source” “Is he in this iron pillar also ?” asked the furious asura. “Yes. He is there also. I see him clearly”. The Asura looked at the iron pillar and smote it with his bare hands. It split in two with a deafening sound and there emerged a huge form, half lion, half man with many arms, armed with divine weapons. His head was covered with golden manes, with ears erect and a cavernous mouth and cruel teeth and red tongue lolling

out. Sparks flew from his eyes and his continuous roar was like thunder reverberating in mountain top. With great agility, the Asura jumped aside and snatching a sword and buckler sprang at the man-lion. With his long powerful arms, the Narasimham caught the Asura by the hip, laid him on his lap, dug his claws into the Asura's breast and pulling out the heart and entrails garlanded himself with it. It was all over. The great Hiranyakasipu , conqueror of the three worlds the terror of the gods and the tormentor of sages was laid low.

The Narasimham had not calmed down. He was still shivering with anger. Nobody dared approach him. The gods, demi-gods, gandharvas, nagas and sages all tried to come near singing psalms of praise but the Man-Lion showed no signs of calming down.

He was still growling, drenched in blood lashing his tail and ready to spring on any one daring to come near. The devas had a plan. They prevailed on Sri Lakshmy Devi, Vishnu's consort to go near. The Devi took one or two steps and stopped short. She too was terrified and could not recognize her Lord in this guise. As a last resort the gods prevailed on Prahlada to go near the awful Man-Lion. Prahlada had no fear and approached Narasimham , Man-Lion , with folded hands. The Lion's eyes became moist thinking of the great sufferings his devotee had been subjected to. Narasimham gently placed his hands on Prahlada as if blessing him and at once songs of praise gushed forth from the Child.

“When Brahma and the gods are unable to please thee,

How can I, a child born of asura hope to please you.

Methinks, neither high birth nor wealth

nor beauty and strength, nor intellect

can please you great God
as the devotion of that elephant in distress

“A chandala of low birth who has
devoted his mind, words and actions to you
Is superior to a brahmin of high birth
Who has turned his face away from you
All things are yours. By giving you offerings
A devotee is increasing his own worth
As a man adorning his face is not doing it
For the image in the mirror but for himself.”

Prahlada does not stake any claim. “A Father cannot save his son . Medicines do not always save. Even any number of births and deaths do not take one nearer to you. I do not want even blessings as they are chimeras in the desert. The senses are like the several wives of the householder, pulling him in different directions. Bound by one’s own past actions we are inexorably led to repeat our mistakes unless you take pity and lead us to you. Save me, Save all”.

The Lord said “Prahlada, dear child! Wait a little more as an example to all devotees. You are the emperor of the three worlds and the master of untold wealth. I know you have no desire for them. You must exhaust your merit by judicious enjoyment and demerit by patient suffering and when the account is clear both ways, come to your final abode with me.” With these words the Narasimham vanished.

*“He prayeth best; who loveth best;
All things both great and small
For, the dear god who loveth us
He made and loveth all”*

Coleridge – “ The Ancient mariner”

The story was first told by Sri Narada to Yudhishtira. Sri Narada continued “How lucky you are in having this same Vishnu, Sri Krishna, as your uncle, protector and guide all through your life. I shall now narrate another story illustrating his unique greatness.

The Story of Mayan, the Master Builder of The Asuras.

After the lapse of a long time, the devas recovered their former glory and oppressed their rivals, the asuras. They approached their guru, Mayan the master builder who was also a great engineer and knew many secrets. He built three great cities of iron, silver and gold. Residing in these cities the asuras could fly over any place occupied by their rivals the devas and settle down crushing all those below. The devas were in great distress and approached Lord Siva, one of the Trinity. Lord Siva, the kindest of the Trinity at once obliged took out his mighty bow and showered arrows. The asuras were laid low but Mayan again came to the rescue. He dug a great well; filled with elixir and threw the asuras into it. They were restored and came out like lightning from the clouds. The elixir had to be destroyed. Sri Hari became a cow and Brahma became a calf and they jumped into the well and drank off all the life giving elixir. Lord Siva resumed the fight

with special arrows symbolizing wisdom, forgiveness, fortitude, truth, etc. The asuras could not withstand these and were vanquished. The devas were once more restored to their abode. The magic cities of metal were reduced to ashes and Lord Siva was henceforth known as the Destroyer of Three Cities

Varna Ashrama Dharmam

King Yudishtira ,Parikshits ancestor, was now desirous of knowing more about varna ashrama dharmam from no less a person than Sri Narada Maharishi. The sage obliged “I shall tell you what I have learned from Sri Narayana Maharshi who is still at Badary ashram. People should be always optimistic, practice equality, maintain silence, aim at renunciation and practice self introspection. These are essential for all castes.”

The caste system was not a water tight division. Some opted to become brahmins; others preferred soldiering still others preferred trade or agriculture and change from one system to another was natural. Now all that has changed and we have become the laughing stock of the world.

CHAPTER 10

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*erjeobeele'i

Sk 8. Ch 2 - Slokam 1

Gajendra Moksham

In the southern regions there was a great mountain called Trikuta with three peaks of iron, silver and gold and the foot hills were strewn with precious gems like diamond, emerald and pearls and it was girt all around by an ocean of milk. As the shores were drenched by the ocean, all kinds of trees like the banyan, teak, sandalwood, deodar grew in profusion and parrots of various hues, swans and kites, flitted in the sunshine filling the air with their notes. There were waterfalls, which with a subdued roar were filling a vast lake. In that lake there grew lilies and lotuses, which imparted a fragrance to the cool water. The lake was fringed with leafy trees that sheltered various animals. The deer and hare were harmless denizens but you could hear also the distant roar of a lion and growl of the tiger. But even these dared not approach a herd of wild elephants lead by their king, a huge tusker. He was undoubtedly the king of the forest.

On a particularly torrid day, the elephant herd decided to have a plunge and with trunks raised and rolling eyes and ears fanning and shrilly trumpeting, crashed through the bush woods and bamboo groves and plunged into the cool lake. The king tusker was foremost. He waded carefully; filled his trunk with the scented water, drank his fill and splashed the water over himself and then over the baby elephants even as a householder bathes his children. They were thus happily sporting in the cool waters little suspecting the impending danger. As fate would have it, a huge crocodile dug its teeth in the feet of the elephant king and began to draw it towards greater depths and there ensued a great tug of war. The

mighty tusker pulled with all his enormous strength but the crocodile was in his element. The fight went on for days, weeks and months. The elephant was weakening. The other elephants tried their best to save their leader but without success. The female elephants too tried to save their lord. When they too failed, they just stood by and wept. The story says, the struggle went on for years, a thousand years. Thus when the Gajendra (elephant king) was completely helpless and sinking, the associations of his previous birth revived in his memory and he sang a great hymn calling on Hari for help.

Neither my cousins nor my wives can help me
I am dragged by fate in the shape of this alligator,
I surrender to Hari the refuge of all in distress.

By your order death comes to creatures
I come to you for help
I bow to you Lord! From whom
All this world has sprung
This world is in you and
To you this world returns

And when there is total darkness
You alone remain and
By your power you;
Bring them back again.
The seers, self-controlled, with no attachment

Walk this world, without scratches
with your help, May you be my friend too-
I bow to you, who illumines the mind
The eternal witness, beyond words
Beyond mind and even intellect

You can be reached only by satvic conduct
By desireless action. You grant saintly happiness
And you are the disposer of final release

My salutations to Thee who art mild
To thee who art terrible, upholder of equality
To thee, the essence of wisdom

Because of your great kindness
You save those bound by beastly qualities
You have entered the body of every creature
And are present everywhere;

I worship that eternal one
Not very clear to ordinary men
But realizable by the spiritual minded
The lovers of solitude desire nothing
They just want thy presence

Getting immersed in the ocean of bliss
Singing the stories of thy deeds

Brahma, Siva and other gods
Are yourself with different names
And different forms and attributes;

Like sparks from fire and rays from the Sun
You emit the worlds and the stream of gunas
With intellect and mind streams of beings

Thou art not god or asura
Not man, not woman not beast
Not the gunas, yet encompasseth all

I do not want to lead this life
With its coverings inside and out
I want realization that is beyond time

To thee of irresistible power
Beyond the gunas and protector
of all supplicants, I bow again and again.”

Praised by the Gajendra in this way the lesser gods held
back and Hari appeared borne on Garuda wafting the Vedas with

his wings. Plucking a lotus with his trunk the elephant king offered it to Sri Hari in adoration crying “O! Narayana, Master of all , my salutations!” Sri Hari threw his chakra; the alligator was split into two; its jaws relaxed and the elephant was free! Sri Hari caressed his trunk and he was transformed as a Deva having the same form as Sri Hari.

Previous History of The Elephant and Alligator

Indra Dymna the Pandiyan King was a great devotee of Sri Hari. One day, while he was engaged in rigorous worship, the sage Agastya arrived with his disciples. But the king neither rose to welcome him nor even moved. The sage’s ire was aroused “You are neglecting your duty of receiving holymen. You are dull like an elephant . You must be born as an elephant” and straight away he was born as an elephant . His former memories lingered and came to his rescue in the end.

And this alligator was a gandharva Huhu by name. Once accompanied by his wives he was bathing in sacred godhavari, splashing the water when he spied the Maharishi Devala who after the ablutions was praying to the sun. In a spirit of fun, perhaps to amuse his wives, the foolish gandharva dived in the water and caught hold of the feet of Devala, perhaps to frighten him. The Maharishi at once recognized the gandharva and cursed him to become an alligator. As soon as Hari’s chakra touched him he regained his former shining form and departed to his own world, singing the Lord’s praises. The devas and sages had assembled as usual to see the release of the elephant, singing praises of the Lord and Sri Hari spoke as follows in the hearing of all.

“If in the early hours, before sunrise anyone sings about this release of Gajendra , I shall give him a clear intellect and final release at the last moment when the spirit of everyone leaves the body”

CHAPTER 11

Óes þee/je° queqeb^ëe Hå/æSee/æbe NeúiefKåq; >
çefj Nerëe f/æjen Óefúpeþ; þesqef=Óex peÓefþNeÓee: >>

Sk 8. Ch 7 - Slokam 1

The Great Churning

Briefly describing the succeeding manvantaras (regions of various manus) and minor avatars (incarnations) of Sri Vishnu Sri Suka mentioned the churning of the ocean of milk and Sri Hari's part in it. Sri Parikshith was curious and prayed the sage for a more detailed account.

Sri Suka continued "Once, Indra incurred the curse of Durvasa and had to go into hiding and the asuras with Bali at their head usurped their abode. The devas as usual approached Brahma their common forefather; but Lord Brahma too could not help as the times were not propitious. With Brahma at their head they went in a deputation to Vishnu (Hari). A great hymn in praise of Vishnu (Hari) gushed forth from Brahma and its gist is as follows:

"Great Lord! Thou art without beginning or end
Beyond thought, eternal witness, ever present
Thou art the Truth, the axle supporting
The wheel whose spokes are the senses and pranas
Thy mind is soma, face is fire that gives wealth
Thy eye is the sun and thy prana the cosmic energy
We all follow as the retinue follows the King
Indra is your strength and devas your grace
Your anger is rudra (Siva) and Brahma is your intellect
Your chest is the seat of Dharma and back of Adharma

Yama resides in your brow and eyelids are time
Your yoga maya created the all powerful gunas
Desire prompted work may do some good but more trouble
Even insignificant work done for you brings great reward
With our limited powers we cannot understand you
Salutations to you again and again”

Thus extolled Sri Hari appeared in full splendour. He was azure blue in colour; face and eyes beaming with kindness and his long powerful arms carrying divine weapons. He spoke with a voice like rolling thunder.

“O! Brahman, O! Sambho (Siva) and you gods! I know why you have come. Bide a little more . Your rivals ,unlike you, have great respect for their preceptor the highly learned Sukracharya, the master of many secret mantras and their leader Bali is a righteous ruler and invincible. But you come to me for succour. You must get divine amrita by churning the ocean of milk with the help and cooperation of the powerful asuras. The Manthara mountain shall be your churning rod, serpent Vasuki will be the churning rope. Let Indra with a few attendants go to Bali and request his help.” The celestials agreed and Indra with Varuna, Agni and a few devas approached Bali surrounded by his councillors and gently broached his scheme. “Great King! Why should we quarrel? Let us be friends and cooperate hereafter. Moreover, are we not cousins descended from the same ancestor, the great Kashyapa Maharishi? I have a plan by which we both can become immortal. By churning the ocean of milk with mount Manthara as the churning rod and serpent Vasuki as the rope we can get many precious things (which we can divide fairly of course) and divine amrita, by drinking which we can become immortal”. King Bali was pleased with the proposal especially

with the modest behaviour of Indra and agreed to cooperate.

The devas next approached the great serpent Vasuki and requested him to be the churning rope. Vasuki at first demurred but agreed when the devas offered him also a share of the elixir. The devas and asuras now approached mountain Manthara from either side and began digging furiously. Thrusting their mighty hands under the mountain and shouting in unison they heaved and raising it shoulder high staggered slowly towards the ocean. But the weight proved too heavy and the mountain slowly settled down crushing the bearers. The surviving devas prayed to Hari. And Hari now assumed a colossal form sitting on a colossal garuda , easily lifted the mountain and placing it on the back of garuda flew towards the ocean and dropped it in the ocean. Vasuki the great serpent wound himself round the mountain. Sri Hari, as a participant took his position at the mouth end and all the devas followed suit. The asuras had to catch the tail end. But now a problem arose. The asuras refused to take the tail end. “We are high born warriors and conquerors. Well versed in all the sastras and Vedas. We refuse to take the ignoble position at the tail end.” Sri Hari smiled. He had anticipated this “All right! No problem. We shall exchange positions”. Accordingly the asuras were positioned at the mouth end and devas at the tail end. And the great churning began. It ended also at once. The mountain slipped down easily from the slimy coils of Vasuki. The participants were in a fix and the devas again prayed to Hari. Sri Hari of course responded. Taking the form of an immense tortoise he crawled under the mountain and heaved it up. And now the churning began. Soon, the participants tired and stopped. And then a wonderful sight was seen Sri Hari was seen at the top of the mountain. With one hand he was holding the tail end and with the other hand the mouth end of Vasuki. The mountain turned one semicircle and then back again and the churning went on briskly.

A precious stone of great beauty and brilliance turned up. It was the Kaustubha and by common consent it was given to Sri Hari. A white horse the Uchaisravas next surfaced. Bali appropriated it as his own special war horse. Next to surface was Airavatham, the white elephant with four tusks and Indra was glad to accept it as his own carrier. The churning became brisker and there arose a glorious lady Sri Lakshmy Devi the goddess of wealth. Every one wanted her but Sri Devi walked nonchalantly through the lane of suitors and garlanded Sri Hari who took her to his bosom. Now arose Varuni a beautiful damsel carrying a large vessel brimful with wine. The asuras wanted nothing else and accepted the damsel with the vessel overflowing with wine and made merry. However this merriment was short lived . Soon the sea was agitated, black fumes were spouting; the deadly poison Halahalam was surfacing. The devas panicked. This time they decided to approach Sri Siva, the kindest of the Trinity. “Hail! Great lord! Thou art the personification of wisdom and mercy’ Save us your dependants in this crisis”. The great God Siva was in contemplation with Uma (Parvathy) by his side. He had given half his body to her “O! Uma, Bhavani, my dear! Do you see these poor devotees who have come to me in their distress. It is the duty of all good people to help people in distress even unasked! How much more when they actually crave for help in distress. I shall swallow this poison!” Bhavani was not shocked. She knew well the all merciful and all powerful nature of her Lord.

The churning proceeded and the blue black poison emerged. No cup could hold it. So Lord Siva cupped his palms and received it. Seeing no other safe receptacle the great Lord just swallowed the deadly poison, retaining it in his throat. The fair throat turned blue and Lord Siva gained one more name Neelakanda or the god with the blue throat. The celestials who were witnessing all this from above, showered flowers and garlands worshipped Sri Siva’s

feet and returned singing hymns of praise about this unheard of sacrifice.

Soon, the atmosphere cleared; the churning became brisker, sweet airs were blowing, the water became luminous and a magnificent form was emerging; Bhagavan Dhanvantari, the foremost of all physicians, their patron and ideal, carrying the vessel of nectar in one hand and the book Ashtanga Hridayam (The great treatise on medicine and healing) in the other. The asuras became restless and suddenly snatching the vessel of elixir scampered with it to their camp and placed it in their leader's hands. The poor gods were again in a fix. It was sad to miss the prize by a hairbreadth. Their infallible refuge benefactor and patron was also not to be seen.

Just then, they could hear a sweet sound as of ringing silver bells at a distance.

The Coming Of Mohini

Looking in that direction they saw a damsel of extraordinary beauty approaching. All eyes, of devas and asuras, were now riveted on the dancer. She was draped in gossamer silk held in position by a golden girdle. The pearl pendants were of the purest and her bewitching smile proclaimed that she was no puritan. The sensual asuras fell all in a heap. Even the devas who ought to have known better, were bewitched. On hearing the problem of the asuras about the distribution of the elixir, Mohini offered to help provided they raised no objection in the process. The asuras were so fargone in their infatuation that they solemnly promised to keep quiet and Mohini took up the vessel and ordered them all to take a bath as it was going to be a sacred function.

When they had bathed, dressed and ornamented themselves she arranged them to sit in a long row with their plates before

them. Facing them the devas sat in another row with their plates. The lady with the vessel now approached with mincing steps and turning right and left began to serve. She was so overwhelmingly beautiful the asuras could see nothing else. The serving began with the devas. The asuras remembering their promise kept quiet. One asura was impatient. He changed rows and nudged himself between the sun and moon gods. He too was served the nectar and he promptly put it in his mouth. But before he could gulp it down the mistake was pointed out by sun and moon and the lady (Sri Hari) cut off his head. The body immediately fell dead but the head became immortal. Ever since it is floating in the sky as Rahu, eclipsing the sun and moon during the eclipses. The elixir pot was empty. All the devas were rejuvenated and strong. They had become immortals. The asuras were weary and disillusioned but had lost none of their ferocity. Taking up their arms, they rushed to their leader Bali for further orders.

The Great Deva Asura War

King Bali was a great warrior and devotee of Hari and grandson of Prahlada. He rallied all the asuric forces and seated in Vaihayasa a magic vehicle and surrounded by warriors like Namuchi, Jhamba advanced into battle. To them were opposed Indra mounted on Airavata, Matali, Vayu and Agni. The heroic warriors on both sides had curious mounts. Lions, tigers, hyenas, leopards, even cats and dogs were opposed to elephants, camels, bulls and rhinoceros. Birds were also engaged. Eagles, peacocks, larks and parrots were opposed by vultures, kites and crows. Even aquatic creatures entered the fray, whales against sharks and so on. In short half the creation was ranged against the other half. Indra wielded his thunder bolt Bali had his magic bow and inexhaustible quiver full of arrows. The battle was long and fierce.

In the end by the grace of Hari the devas and their partisans prevailed. Bali and his partisans announced a temporary retreat biding their time. They retreated to the western mountains where the great Sukracharya revived them with his mantras (spells) and medicines.

Sri Siva's Illusion

In his retreat at Sri Kailasa Lord Siva heard of the happenings at the end of the great churning; how the asuras were deprived of amrita (elixir) by Sri Hari taking the form of a female. Accompanied by Uma Devi and the cohorts (goblins) they set out to Vaikunta, Sri Hari's abode. The Lord received them with great respect and after the usual greetings Sri Siva said "Great Lord! Thou art strength and existence. We have heard how you gave the elixir to the devas and not to the asuras by assuming the form of a lady. We too are desirous of seeing that form" Sri Hari smiled and warned them of the danger. Presently there was a great calm and then as suddenly a breeze sprang up and the party found themselves in a garden thick with flowering trees. The same divine damsel (who had duped the asuras earlier) appeared. This time she was playing with a ball striking it with either hand as it rebounded (as girls often do). A naughty breeze partly blew aside her silk dress revealing her charms. The great ascetic that Siva was, could restrain himself no longer and darted after the dancer forgetting all decorum and even the presence of his own consort Umadevi. The dancer was quicker; she slipped fast leading him a pretty dance over hill and dale through briar and thorn; with bruised feet and perspiring brow. The great doyen of ascetics realized his error. He had once burned to ashes cupid in his ire and the same cupid, since revived, had his revenge now. Wherever the earth was drenched with blood or perspiration, a mine of

diamonds or gold materialized. And Sri Hari appeared, fresh and glorious and smilingly said “O! Sambho! You have gallantly passed the test. Still, you see the danger of the proximity of the other sex. May this be a warning to all sanyasis” Saying this Sri Hari vanished and Lord Siva, sadder and wiser now, returned with Sri Umadevi and his cohorts back to the icy solitudes of his abode Mount Kailash.

Sri Suka said “I have described to you the great power of Sri Hari. He who reads this with devotion will be freed from all desires especially the sex.

The Manwantaras And Revival Of Bali

Sri Suka then proceeded to describe the different manvantaras. He spoke about the manus (rulers) and sages and Indras over a period of time that staggers the imagination. He also spoke about the minor avatars (incarnations) of Sri Hari as Yagna, Prajeswara, sustaining the Vedas and Dharma and how they were retrieved when lost. Parikshit wanted to hear the story of Bali which was left incomplete. Sri Suka continued. Bali was in oblivion for a long time. He never lost faith in his preceptor and guide, the great Sukracharya . Sukracharya, by his potent medicines and mantras (spells) revived all the asuras. The sage and his disciples, next conducted a great yagna (sacrifice) called Viswajit . Sri Hari himself emerged guiding a splendid chariot and splendid horses and a divine coat of mail and weapons. From the flag staff floated a flag with the emblem of a roaring lion. Thus equipped and at the head of his mighty warriors, Bali approached the gates of heaven (Indra’s abode) and blew his conch. The devas, immersed in pleasure all the time, now trembled. Their guru the wise Brihaspathy advised them to lie low, hiding wherever they could and wait for better times. In great haste they forsook the pleasure gardens, temples and palaces of marble, and ran for their

lives and hid wherever they could. Bali and his cohorts now occupied Indra's place and ruled the world.

Aditi, Indra's mother, retired to a hermitage in the midst of a forest, spending her days in worship. One day, her lord and husband the great rishi Kashyapa came to the hermitage. Hiding her sorrow as best as she could Aditi washed his feet, offered him a seat and fruits and flowers. The rishi performed his usual ablutions; took his seat and now noted that his dear wife was sad and anxious. He kindly enquired "Are not the affairs of the ashram going on well? Are you not performing the daily pujas without fail? Did you send any sanyasi coming for alms, empty handed?" Aditi replied "Lord! By your grace and power, the ashram is running well. No seeker of food is turned away and the pujas (worship) are performed punctually. You are the progenitor of all creatures, devas, asuras, gandharvas and every living being and therefore equally concerned with the well being of all. My children, the devas, have been driven from their abode and are wandering homeless and unhappy. Deign to have pity on them, so they may again come back to their abode." The rishi smiled and observed "Wonderful is the power of maya (illusion). Who is the son? who is the father, who is a relative and who is not a relative? Still, if you desire a restoration, worship Hari with all your heart. He is kind and generous and the giver of all things. And the best way of worshipping Him is by observing the Payovrita (milky discipline) as I have heard from Lord Brahma, my father. It is as follows.

The Payovrita

"In the bright fortnight of the month of Phalgun the devotee should make an image of Sri Hari. After taking bath before sunrise, adorn it with fresh flowers and garlands, light lamps with ghee; burn incense; recite stotras (hymns) invoking the almighty even in

that earthen image and prostrate in all humility casting out all egoism . Perform arati and offer nivedyam (food for god). This holy food should be made of rice well cooked in milk adding sugar and honey. This should be made in generous quantities and offered to holy brahmins, guests and strangers. And again prostrating before God's image should say "Great Lord! Absolve me of all sin and tendency to commit it" This should continue for twelve days and on the thirteenth day there should be general feasting. Even the blind and beggars should be fed. It must be clearly understood that food given to the poor, the sick and the disabled, reaches God direct. This alone is real charity, real worship and real wisdom ."

Worshipped and addressed in this way, the lord immediately appeared, dressed in yellow silk , with lustrous eyes and beaming face, four armed, bearing the conch, the discus, the mace and the lotus . "I know what you desire. I was born as your son in the past and I shall be born again as your son and Kashyapa's and regain your lost splendours". Saying this the lord vanished. Aditi felt a great exultation and returned to the hermitage to inform Kashyapa about the great vision and its promise. But the sage knew all this through his foresight. Moreover he felt a great power within him and in due course at a particularly auspicious time when all the planets had positioned themselves favourably on sravana dwadasi, the divine child was born to Aditi. The devas who had prior knowledge of this, had assembled overhead. Singing and dancing, they showered flowers and garlands. As the delighted parents were still looking on, the baby suddenly changed his form to that of a young boy ripe for initiation into Brahmachariyam. As the ashramvasis (other sanyasis) were preparing for the ceremony of investiture with the sacred thread the celestials took a hand. The sun himself instructed him the Gayatri manthra . Brihaspathy was ready with the sacred thread. Kashyapa gave the grass girdle.

Prithvi , earth goddess gave the deer skin to sit on and Soma lord of the forests, presented the Brahmachari's staff. His mother Aditi gave him a loin cloth. An umbrella was presented by the sun and Brahma gave a kamandalu (Vessel) . A japa mala of precious pearls was presented by goddess Parvathy herself. Kubera (the lord of wealth) gave the begging bowl. The young brahmachari, thus equipped had a divine halo of light and he immediately began to perform a homam (worship of fire).

The assembled sanyasins heard a rumour that King Bali, now master of the three worlds was performing a great yagna called Aswamedha or horse sacrifice. Great gifts were distributed and they too wanted to go. Aditi's son, Vamana also decided to go with them. The yagna campus was on the northern bank of the river Narmada at a place called Bhrigukacha. As he walked, the earth trembled. With his staff and kamandalu and umbrella Vamana looked brilliant like the rising sun. The Bhrigus and all the officiating priests arose with one accord, dazzled by the brilliance. King Bali accompanied by Sukrachariya and the bhargava priests hastened to receive the approaching Vamana "O! Noble Brahmacharin! We are surely blessed by your coming" Bali then washed his feet sprinkling the holy water on himself and his queen and son and continued "What will you have? A house, farmland or a whole village? Or a damsel with attendants so you can become a householder, grahastasrami? Command me and all this will be yours".

To this, Vamana replied "I expected no less from the descendant of Prahlada. Hiranyakasipu and Hiranyaksha were great heroes, Vishnu overcame them only by stratagem. They were generous and freely gave to holy men whatever they wanted. I want three feet of land measured with my feet". Bali smiled and said "O! ho! I see you have only a child's intellect. Ask for something more. A village, a country, a continent?" Vamana gently

replied “Great King! A person who is not satisfied with three feet of land will not be satisfied even with three villages or even with a continent. A brahmin should be content with what he gets accidentally. Otherwise he loses his lustre . I want three feet of land and nothing more”. Seeing the boy so firm in his demand, the great emperor smiled and asked his queen Vindhyavali to bring holy water to make the gift.

Just then, the astute Sukracharya intervened. “Hold! Hold! This is not a common boy. He is Sri Hari himself who has come in this guise to help the devas. He will assume a colossal form and with two steps he will measure earth and heaven. What will you do after that. There is a limit to alms giving. One’s wealth should be divided into five parts one each for the king, for family for guests, for ancestral worship and only one part for alms giving. Giving everything to this Hari, how will you maintain yourself, you fool! You are reluctant to say no after saying yes. There are five occasions when a lie is permissible! to please a woman, in jest, to finalise a marriage, for preserving one’s livelihood , to save a life.

Bali, the emperor of the three worlds, pondered for a while and then said meekly but firmly “Great Master! All that you are saying is true; but how can I, born in the family of Prahlada refuse to give a boon after promising it? Besides; if this boy is Sri Hari himself, what greater happiness can I have?” So saying he asked Vindhyavali his queen to bring the vessel containing holy water. She was ready at hand . Together they solemnly poured the holy water into the boy’s palms giving the land and then a great wonder was seen.

The boy grew taller and taller; his head was beyond the clouds and touched the sky. With one colossal step he measured earth; with another he measured heaven; for the third step there was no place. Bali quickly pointed to his own head. “Place it on my head my lord, so I can fulfill my promise” Bali and the attending

onlookers looked up and wonder of wonders! They saw the whole of prakriti, the earth, sky , heaven and all the fourteen worlds, ranged in perfect order. Oceans formed the stomach region. Rishis and forests were in his matted locks . The netherworlds formed the undersurface of his feet. His chest was the region of the stars. Dharma was the heart . Vedas and sounds were in the region of the neck. There was sun in eyes, fire in face and vedic commandments in his brows . Day and night were in his eyelids. Anger was in his forehead and adharma in his back . Death was in his shadow and maya in his laughter.

Nanda, Sunanda , Sri Chakra (the deity of the discus) and the great eagle Garuda were in attendance. As a final test of Bali's attachment to truth, Sri Hari ordered Garuda to bind him hand and foot. Even in this extreme predicament Bali did not flinch. He kept his vow. The celestials who were hovering above, all the time, could contain themselves no longer. Singing songs and hymns, they showered flowers and garlands shouting "Hail! Hail! To Maha Bali!" and Sri Hari said "Maha Bali, you have stood every test. Loss of power, wealth and fame. Let Indra remain in heaven for some time more. Meanwhile I shall send you to Sutala which is no less magnificent and there you shall rule with your queen and son and the foremost of devotees your grand father Prahlada will also be there and I will be the watchman at the gate, guarding your city from all enemies. And in due time you will even return to Heaven."

CHAPTER 12

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Sk 9. Ch 4 - Slokam 15

Matsyavataram The Lord's Avatar As Fish

At the end of every long epoch of time, there occurs a great flood submerging everything except Sri Hari and Adishesha the great serpent. We shall now narrate some events leading to the impending great flood. In the southern part of Bharat (India) there is a broad land through which flows the sparkling river Kritamala (modern Tambraparni). On either bank at intervals are grand temples whose gopurams glisten in the morning sun. Satyavrata the devout king of a devout people was one fine morning performing the morning ablutions in the river. He filled his palms with the river water and was about to pour it down as an offering to the sun god, when he noticed a tiny fish within his palms. The fish began to speak “O!King! do not throw me into the river which is teeming with my enemies sharks and alligators” Moved with pity the king put it gently in his own kamandalu (brass vessel) filled with water, intending to deposit it in a lake or big pond. Soon the fish increased in size and the king hastily deposited it in a pond. Here too, it became too big for the pond and then it was arranged that it should be deposited in the sea. Now wisdom dawned on the king “You are no ordinary fish. You must be Lord Hari, Sri Narayana himself who has taken this form for some definite purpose” and the fish replied “True! O! King! I have assumed this form to warn you and all good people. On the seventh day from now, there will be a great deluge. The seas will over run the land submerging everything. You must build a big boat . Fill it with provisions for a long time. Take specimens of plants and herbs and their seeds.

Take the seven rishis too. As the billows toss your boat in the high seas against a strong wind I shall come as a huge fish with a horn protruding from the head. With Vasuki (serpent) as a rope, attach your boat to my horn. I will guide you safely over the turbulent waters to a safe haven.”

Everything happened as foretold. During this dreary time the great fish told Satyavrata some home truths “Every living creature is born according to his previous actions. He has to be purified in the fire of suffering and intense devotion. No other means will suffice. As gold and silver cannot be purified by any amount of washing but only by fire. Service to god (fellow creatures) is that fire” The king and the seven rishis listened with bowed head. The great flood was over. The sun shone again. All heaved a sigh of relief Satyavrata was made the Manu (Ruler) of the next Manvantara called Vaivaswata Manvantara. The puranam (story) adds that the lord killed two demons named Madhu and Kaitabha who had stolen the Vedas and restored them back to the rishis

Ambarisha

Nabagha the son of Manu had four sons, the youngest of whom was also named Nabagha. He was sent to an ashram (hermitage) for gurukula education. After a long period, he became a learned scholar and with his guru's blessings returned to his father's house. Thinking that he would not return and might become a naishtika brahmachari (celibate for life) the elder brothers had partitioned their father's scant property among themselves and when Nabagha asked for his share they simply said “You can take our old father as your share” Nabagha was content but the old father was angry “I am not a property to be partitioned”. Nevertheless he told his son “Not far from here the rishis are

performing the Angiras sathram with a view to ascend to heaven. The mantras are difficult requiring expert practice. You are well versed. Go and help them to recite correctly. When they ascend to heaven, they will give you the golden vessels and the remnants of the sacrifice.” The son did as he was advised. The sages were delighted with his services and presented him with all the remnants. Just as he was taking possession a stranger appeared and claimed the remnants as his share. It was Sri Rudra (Lord Siva) himself and he added “If you have any doubt, go and ask your father”. Nabagha returned to his father and said rather sadly “Father, I got the presents alright but a stranger with an imposing figure came from the north and claimed them.” The father thought for a while and replied “My son, the stranger is right. He is no other than great Rudra. According to a previous agreement arrived at the end of the Daksha yagna, he is entitled to the remains.” The son immediately returned and prostrating before Sri Rudra begged his forgiveness. Sri Rudra was pleased “I am pleased with the truthfulness of your father and your own modest behaviour. I give you freely all these”. So saying Lord Siva disappeared. Nabagha took possession of these remnants and spent the remainder of his life worshipping Sri Hari and taking care of his old father to the very end. Ambarisha was the son of this Nabagha.

Ambarisha, the darling of the gods became a kshatriya. Because of his devotion to Sri Hari and truthfulness he became invincible. He soon became the overlord of the seven continents girt by the oceans. Tributes came pouring in and he became the master of immense wealth unequalled since or before. The subjects were so happy and prosperous that they did not want anything better , not even heaven. All this prosperity, only strengthened the king’s piety and love of truth, if at all, it could be strengthened. The festivals of the Lord were conducted with pomp and splendour. And yet the great emperor was the humblest of the humble. He

was perfectly aware all the time that all these material blessings were unreal insubstantial as a dream. He observed religious fasts, especially the fast on ekadasi day as it was particularly dear to Lord Hari. He was always engaged in service to Hari. He personally cleaned the temple precincts; his eyes feasted on Hari's idol; his ears were constantly hearing stories or hymns and he was enveloped by the fragrance of the tulasi garlands adorning the idol. As he was always thus engrossed Lord Hari sent his own weapon sudarsan to guard and help him in every way.

Once as usual he had fasted on ekadasi day, kept vigil all night and bathing in the yamuna early morning was preparing slowly to break his fast. The brahmanas and every one present were sumptuously fed. It was dwadasi; only a few hours were left and the fast should be broken before it was over. Just then, came the sage Durvasa with a large retinue of sages. The king received them with great courtesy. They were quite hungry but they said "We shall take our bath in the holy Yamuna first and after the morning ablutions shall certainly come for lunch" So saying, they departed and the king waited. Hours passed. No sign of the guests. The king was becoming anxious. If he did not break his fast before dwadasi was over, the vow would be broken; if he took food, he would be guilty of insulting his guests. He was in a serious dilemma.

He consulted his ministers, wise men and sages. They pondered for a while and then they said "O! King! It is written in the sastras that by taking a little holy water you can keep your vow and you would not be showing any disrespect to your guest also" The king was relieved. He took just a few drops of holy water. His vow was kept and he had not offended his guest and so he calmly awaited the return of great Durvasa maharishi.

Soon after, Durvasa and his followers appeared. His lips were quivering with anger. With his spiritual insight he had already

known of what had happened. With flashing eyes and quivering white beard he shouted “How dare you to invite a sanyasin for a feast and break your fast in his absence? Your riches and power have made you arrogant. I will teach you a lesson”. So saying, the angry sage took a strand from his matted locks and threw it on the ground. A fierce genii sprang up and rushed towards Ambarisha. But the king neither moved nor even winked his eyes. He stood firm knowing well that he had done no wrong. But sudarsana chakra the flaming disc which had been deputed by Sri Hari to protect the king came into action. It burned up the genii as fire consumes a serpent. Darting fierce tongues of scorching fire it approached Durvasa who immediately turned and fled.

Over hill and dale he fled. Over rivers and oceans, over mountains and valleys over continents he fled with the flaming sudarsan in hot pursuit. At last he reached Brahmaloaka and falling at Brahma’s feet cried “Save me, Save me O! Father of gods and men. Save me from Sudharsana”. But lord Brahma said “Sorry my son. Try some one else. This is beyond my power” Durvasa fled and sought refuge with Sri Rudra at Mount Kailas. But Sri Rudra also pleaded his inability “Dear son, none of us can save you. There are countless universes like this revolving around. Who can understand Sri Hari’s maya? Approach Sri Hari alone. He alone can give you peace”. Dispirited and humbled and scorched by the pursuing sudarsana, Durvasa at last went to Sri Vaikunta Sri Hari’s abode and falling at his feet cried “Pardon, Pardon! O! Lord for wronging thy devotee. Deign to tell me how I may atone for my sin” Sri Hari replied “Noble Brahmin! It is as if I am not free, being bound to my devotees. How can I be free from those who have left their wealth and homes; wives and sons and even their lives, seeking shelter with me? Those, whose hearts are bound to me, good people who view all things equally, they attract me by their devotion even as good women attract good husbands.

My devotees want only to serve me , not caring even for the four forms of mukti (freedom). These good people are my heart. I am their heart. I do not even care so much for Sri Devi (consort) as I care for them. And let me tell you a secret. tapas (austerity) and knowledge if properly used are ornaments to a brahmin but if misused they look otherwise. Therefore O! Learned Brahmin go back to Ambarisha himself and beg his pardon and all will be well”.

Thus instructed Durvasa went back to Ambarisha and was about to fall at his feet. Greatly embarrassed the king raised him up and turning to Sudarsana praised him as follows:

“I bow to thee O! Sudarsana dear to the lord;

Thou art Agni the god of fire

You have a thousand spokes

And can swallow all other weapons

You are Dharma, you are Truth

Protector of all and source of all energy

Destroyer of those that follow Adharma

Irresistible, you destroy asuras in battle

Be thou gentle to this sage, calm down

For our sake and for the welfare of our clans

And if there be any merit in my action’

Calm down and be cool to this sage.”

Praised thus, Sudarsana immediately cooled down. Durvasa was fully relieved and began to praise the king “ Today have I experienced the greatness of Sri Hari’s devotees. They return only good for evil. What is there impossible for them? What is there, they cannot give up? And what is there, they cannot attain

whose very touch makes men holy. O! King! I have been blessed by your astounding mercy. You have pardoned my crime and saved my life” and blessing every one around Baghavan Durvasa returned to his tapas (penance).

Ever since Durvasa had fled for life, the king was praying and fasting for one full year. He had feasted Durvasa before he left and now began to break his year long fast. All these trials only deepened his devotion. At the end of a long and prosperous reign, entrusting the kingdom to his son he too departed to the forest for tapas and attained the feet of Lord Hari.

It is said that he who reads this story of Ambarisha, with faith, will also attain the feet of Lord Hari.

Thrisanku And Viswamitra

As we look at the galaxy of illustrious kings of the solar line some are outstanding for particular qualities. King Thrisanku was famous for the steadiness with which he pursued his objectives. He wanted to go to heaven with his present human body. He implored his guru sage Vasishta, to conduct sacrifices for this purpose. The sage became angry and left. The king then importuned the sons of the sage. They got angrier and cursed the king saying “You are telling us to do something that our venerable father has refused to do. We curse you therefore to have a dwarfish body and black complexion”. The poor king immediately found himself transformed into an ugly looking dwarf. But the king did not despair and was in search for other powerful sages. At this juncture, as fate would have it, Viswamithra the arch rival of Vasishta, appeared and agreed to conduct the yagna. It was conducted in grand style attended by sages and gods and at the end they invoked the presence of Indra with his golden chariot. When Indra did not appear the Maharishi became furious and

raising both hands towards heaven he cried “Rise O! King! To heaven” A tremendous miracle then happened. Thrisanku slowly began to rise. Higher and higher he rose till he almost reached the sky. Indra too became angry at this intrusion and hurled his thunderbolt at the king who began to fall down head long towards earth. “Save me! Save me!” wailed the king. At this Viswamithra roared “Stop! Stop” The descent was stopped. And as the onlookers were gazing, speechless with surprise Viswamithra raising the stupa (a vessel) thundered “Let there be other stars, other planets another sky” and all these did appear. The gods and even Brahma were agitated. They implored Viswamithra not to proceed further. So Thrisanku had his heaven and there they stand to this day, the seven rishis and the duplicate stars proclaiming to the world the mighty power of these ancient rishis.

Sagara And His Aswamedha

Prominent among the descendants of Harischandra was Sagara. He was the overlord of many rulers and decided to perform the horse sacrifice or Aswamedha. Indra (Chief of gods) was alarmed at the growing power of Sagara and stole the horse before the end of the function. The king ordered his sons by his first wife Sumati to go in pursuit and recover the horse. They were a hundred in number, powerful warriors proud of their strength, and started in hot pursuit. They searched everywhere but found no trace of the horse anywhere. And then they began to dig underground and reached a cave where a hoary Maharishi was sitting immersed in deep tapas, sunk in contemplation, and the missing horse was grazing peacefully by his side. The foolish soldiers thought that the thief had assumed this disguise as a hermit to escape justice and rushed towards him. The hermit who was none other than the great Kapila Maharishi opened his eyes and

they were reduced to heaps of ashes. It is said that this was the result of their own sin for, a great sage, an avatar of Vishnu himself could not be so ignorant. When the princes did not return, search parties were sent under his grandson Amsuman. Following the same trail he too reached the same place, saw the heap of ashes, the horse grazing by and the sage Kapila. He praised Kapila and begged forgiveness for his uncles' mistakes. The sage was pleased with the young man's wisdom and modesty and further consoled him saying "My dear child, fate is irresistible. I shall tell you however how to raise your uncles to heaven. Bring the holy river Ganges down to earth. As the waters touch the ashes your uncles will rise again and go straight to heaven". With this message and leading the horse the prince returned. King Sagara completed the yagnam (sacrifice) but neither the king nor his sons and grandsons could bring holy ganga down from heaven. This great feat was accomplished by Amsuman's son, great Bhagiratha.

Bhagiratha Brings Ganga

When Bhagiratha became king the land was peaceful. People were contented and happy. The king had only one consuming desire. "How shall I bring the holy ganga down to earth" He worshipped and prayed so intensely that Ganga devi appeared before him and said "I am pleased with you for your devotion to purify your ancestors and shall come down. But who will bear the force of my descent?" The king thereupon performed intense penance to please Sri Siva who graciously agreed to bear the force of the descent. And so, Ganga devi from her place at the feet of Lord Vishnu, gushed forth; a small rivulet at first but she soon gathered volume and became a mighty river and vainly thought "I am so powerful I will bear Lord Siva in my waves and rush with him down to patala (the nether world)" The all knowing Lord Siva

immediately grew to enormous size and absorbed the rushing waters completely in his matted locks. But the real sufferer was Bhagiratha. He began to do penance, a tapas of utmost severity to please Sri Siva. At the end of one full year the Lord relented and let out the river. Ganga again became a mighty river, sometimes gurgling, sometimes roaring, jumping over precipices, always sparkling, teeming with fishes and presently she was a broad river. In her pride she swarmed through the hermitage of a poor old hermit, Jahnu by name, washing it down completely. Maharishi Jahnu was enraged and using his mystic powers drank up the whole river. The king now prayed to the Maharishi to set her free. The sage relented and let Ganga out through his ears so that Ganges is known by another name also Jahnvi or daughter of Jahnu. The king now led the way, Ganga meekly following him wherever he went. At last he entered Patala. Ganga followed washing the heaps of ashes. At once his ancestors arose with glowing bodies and slowly rose up to heaven and were received with joyous welcome by the devas.

Holy ganga flowing past Kasi washes away the sins of all who take a bath with faith, irrespective of caste or creed. In honour of Bhagiratha who brought ganga to earth she is also known as Bhagirathi.

Khatvanga

Khatvanga was one of the greatest of kings of the solar line. He was invincible and his help was sought by devas in their frequent wars with the demons. During his last visit the war dragged on for a very long time and on its successful conclusion, Indra gave him many valuable presents but also told the king that he had only one hour more to live.

The king was shocked but not distressed. "I have not done

any wrong or unjust action and I have done my duty to gods and men. Surely, Hari will stand by me in this hour of greatest need.” Thinking thus he detached his mind from all earthly possessions, relatives and friends, concentrated on the ultimate divinity that is peace unutterable and happiness everlasting and merged with it. Moral “Time is not too important. Even in the short space of one hour Khatwanga was able to attain Brahman. Why not we? With much more time?”

Khatwanga’s Descendants

Khatwanga’s son was Dirghabahu.; his son was Raghu of great fame; Raghu’s son was Aja and Aja’s son was Dasaratha and Dasaratha’s son was Sri Rama. We can only briefly recount the story of Sri Rama.

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Ramayana

Dasaratha was the king of Ayodhya many thousands of years ago. A great warrior, his aid was sought even by the gods in their wars with the asuras. The king had three wives but had no children. He thought “I am getting old and still have no sons. I must conduct the Puthra-kameshti yagnam”. So he said to the family priest, sage Vasishta, “Revered Sir, I desire a son to succeed me, shall I not perform the Putra kameshti Yagam” And Sage Vasishta replied “Since the thought has occurred to you, you will have sons, famous in all the worlds. I shall gladly conduct the yagnam”. So, preparations were made. Invitations were sent to all maharishis; the king and queens entered on a fast and worship of Hari. There was sumptuous feeding for all. At the conclusion of the yagnam a deity emerged from the sacrificial fire carrying a golden vessel full of delicious divine payasam (pudding) Dasaratha respectfully received the amrit and gave it to his queens.

In due time Kausalya gave birth to Rama, Lakshmana and Satrugna were born to Sumithra and Bharatha to Kaikeyi. No

one can describe the joy of the king and his queens. The princes were the delight of the servants and courtiers and as they grew up they became the darlings of all the people, so brave, so handsome and so respectful to elders and very proficient and skilful in all arts of war and peace. Years passed . They were all nearing the marriageable age and now the king became anxious. He was thinking of their marriage. Just then, the guards came running and announced that the great sage Viswamithra was approaching. Dasaratha hastily approached “Welcome, Welcome Great sage, you are as welcome as the first born is to a childless woman; as copious rain to parched earth. To what happy event do we owe this visit. Only mention it and it will be carried out” The sage was pleased and replied “Rajan! I expected nothing less from a descendant of Ikshwaku and Raghu. We , the sages living in the forest , have been conducting yagnams for the welfare of the world. Of late, our yagnams have been defiled by evil rakshasas, emissaries of powerful Ravana. Send your son Rama with me to protect us from these devils, so we can conduct the yagnams in peace” The king was thunder struck. ”This merciless sanyasi is asking for my darling son scarcely in his teens to fight against the blood thirsty monsters” His brows were clouded . For a moment he hesitated and then gathering courage he firmly replied “ My son is too young to fight with these devils. I shall myself come with my army.” But Viswamithra was firm “I know Rama and Vasishta also knows. If after promising to give any thing , you renege, well , May you prosper’. Fire darted from his eyes and Viswamithra prepared to return. Vasishta the family preceptor realized the danger and advised, “Rajan, send Rama It is for his own good”. The king immediately apologized and with the permission of the queens sent not one but two sons Rama and Lakshmana with the irate Viswamithra who was now all smiles. The princes bade farewell to all their elders and with their weapons

followed the great Maharishi who was already a few steps ahead. After walking in perfect silence for an hour or so they reached the river Sarayu. Then suddenly the Maharishi turned and looking with the utmost tenderness at the princes said, “ Rama, you must be fatigued. Let us bathe in Sarayu.” After their dip in sacred Sarayu, the Maharishi imparted two manthras (sacred verses) the “Bala and Atibala” “Now hunger and thirst and weariness will not affect you” Further the Maharishi instructed them the manthras of various divine weapons. As the princes recited them, the deities of those weapons presented themselves, and said “ We are at your service. Command us”: The princes recited another manthra at which they retired. The trio now crossed Sarayu and advanced further. It was a dense forest, very dreary and lonely and no bird twittered. All at once there was a booming sound and a dark cloud appeared overhead “ O! Sir, what may this be? said the princes “Rama and Lakshmana be ready with your bows. This is the rakshasi, Thataka, the bane of poor sanyasis Spare her not” By this time, she had come overhead raining rocks and huge stones. Rama sent a quivering arrow through her heart. She fell thrashing the ground with her hands and feet and died. Her two sons Maricha and Subahu, now loomed overhead determined to avenge their mother’s death. One arrow brought Subahu down; another arrow pursued Maricha who fled and disappeared into the sea. Viswamithra and the sages were now free to conduct their yagnams in peace. They showered their heart-felt blessings on the princes and small presents such as barks of trees, sacred threads and kusa grass. These were all the things they had and they gave their all. Just then tidings arrived of a great yagna, that would be shortly conducted at Mithila and they all decided to attend that.

Ahalya Moksham

The very next day, the party started. After trudging some weary miles, their way led through a desolate looking hermitage “Pray Sire, whose is this desolate hermitage” Viswamithra looked grave and then added “ O! Rama! Here once lived the great Gautama Maharishi with his chelas and Ahalya, his dharmapathni (wife) Unfortunately, she was deceived by Indra..Gautama cursed Indra quite fittingly but he also imposed a heavy penalty on poor Ahalya. –“ Since you have behaved senselessly like a stone, Become a stone” Relenting the sage added “However, when Sri Rama comes this way, and steps on you, you will regain your real form and glory” As the Maharishi was saying this, Sri Rama stepped on a stone, and it at once changed into a woman who fell on her knees and with tears burst into praises. Just then Gautama too appeared and the pair departed for further penance

Mithila : Janaka’s Court

All roads led to Mithila where king Janaka ruled. The roads were crowded with sages, commoners traders, peddlers, gamblers and dancers. A great gala festival in honor of the Siva Dhanus was going on. News reached king Janaka that the great Viswamithra with two bright disciples was approaching. With suitable presents and garlands and flowers king Janaka approached “Great Maharishi! Welcome to Mithila . Kindly bless us with your presence and pray, who are these god like disciples who are fit to rule the world’ Viswamithra was pleased and said “The elder one is Rama and the younger is Lakshmana; sons of King Dasaratha of Ayodhya They would like to see the great Siva Dhanush”

King Janaka was overjoyed. He had two peerless daughters of marriageable age Sita and Urmila. He had made a hasty vow that he would give Sita only to one who could bend the great Siva Dhanush. Many suitors had tried and failed. If perchance Rama could bend the bow his prayer would be realized. The princes and Viswamithra were lodged and entertained in a magnificent palace.

The Siva Dhanush (Siva's bow) kept some distance away on a platform like contrivance on wheels, was slowly being dragged by a team of oxen towards a great hall adorned with flags and flowers for worship. Soldiers with drawn swords escorted it while musicians played on various instruments and priests intoned hymns and Sri Rudram. The bow was placed reverently before a statue of Nataraja Siva in his famous pose of Cosmic Dance. The walls were adorned with paintings of famous kings of old. Into this hall Viswamithra and the princes entered. They circumambulated the bow, worshipped Lord Siva with bowed heads and folded hands and at a word from Viswamithra, Rama bent down gently caressed the bow and lifted the great bow as if he was raising a garland. Then he stringed the bow and as the onlookers were looking with bated breath, pulled the string to his ears. The mighty bow broke in two with a thundering roar that reached the ends of earth. Sita who was watching from the balcony took up the marriage garland and put it round Rama's neck. A mighty shout arose from the people, around and the devas above "Jai Ram! Jai Sita! Jai Sitaram"! Words cannot describe the joy of king Janaka and his queen. With the consent of the astrologer and rishis Lakshmana's marriage was arranged with Urmila. Similarly, the marriages of Bharatha and Shatrugana with two daughters of Janaka's brother were also arranged. The happy news was immediately sent to king Dasaratha by a speedy courier for his gracious approval and consent.

Speeding like the wind the courier found king Dasaratha in the midst of his venerable councillors and announced the happy news. Dasaratha immediately took a priceless pearl necklace off from his neck and presented it to the messenger. On the advice of Vasishta orders were immediately passed for the whole court to proceed to Mithila with the treasury, the three queens and their attendants travelled in palanquins. Some were riding on chariots, some on horses and some on elephants. After a few days the party reached the outskirts of Mithila and were joyfully received by king Janaka with purna kumbam (vessels filled with ganges water) , pipes playing and drums beating “Pray, what are the details of the dowry” asked Janaka with grave misgiving. Dasaratha replied, “It is for the donors to give what they like. The receivers cannot demand” The whole city was adorned with flags and arches .There was feasting and singing and dancing without end. Vedic mantras and songs were issuing from a splendid hall; the brides and bridegrooms were seated face to face and king Janaka said “O! Rama! Take my daughter Sita by the hand. She will be your partner and companion in following the path of duty and will follow you like your shadow in thick and thin” This manthra (sacred word) by the way is repeated even today in every Hindu marriage. The festivities continued unabated for a week when prince Yudhajit arrived. He was Bharata’s uncle whom Dasaratha in his haste, had forgotten to invite. But the noble prince did not take it amiss as Dasaratha sorely repented and more than made amends.

King Dasaratha now bade farewell to the generous hosts and with pleasant memories and great thankfulness was returning to Ayodhya when a dark cloud appeared ahead and ominous signs overhead boded danger.

Parasurama

An imposing figure was approaching. He was a Brahmin as evidenced by the sacred thread but he carried a great bow and a fearful axe. It was Parasurama, a partial Avatar of Vishnu himself. His father, the sage Jamadagni, had been brutally beheaded by an insolent kshatriya prince and in revenge, Parasurama was roaming round the earth exterminating the kshatriyas and now he had come upon the luckless wedding party. Poor Dasaratha, fell down in a swoon crying "Pity, Pity, great Brahmin. It behoves you a Brahmin, to show pity. My son is so young and only just married". Moaning like this the poor king completely swooned away. Without even looking at Dasaratha, Parasurama turned sternly to Rama and said "Oh! Ho! So you are Rama, who has broken the Siva Dhanush. Look! Here is my Vishnu Dhanush. If you can bend it I shall know that you are a worthy opponent and I shall grant you battle". Prince Rama looked stern and said "Give me your bow". The prince raised the proffered bow, strung it and fitting an arrow, drew it easily and sternly said to Parasurama "O! Brahmin, now show me the target I never draw an arrow in vain" Parasurama now realized that this was Lord Vishnu himself and said gently "You are Vishnu himself. I am not humbled by bowing to you. Release your arrow and let it consume all the merit I have acquired" So, saying Parasurama retreated with folded hands. A great shadow had lifted and king Dasaratha recovering asked "Has Parasurama left?" On being assured that the redoubtable Brahmin had left, the king heaved a sigh of relief and resumed the journey to Ayodhya. The citizens hearing the glad news had bedecked the city, like a bride and eagerly awaited their princes' arrival. There were weeks of rejoicing. The three queen mothers doted on their daughters in law and Dasaratha in his durbar with his heroic sons around carrying out his orders seemed like Indra in heaven holding

court with the great gods Agni, Varuna etc at his behest It was a time of great felicity for all but alas! It was destined to be short.

It occurred to the king that he too was getting old and that he must relinquish everything and enter the forest for Tapas (penance) like his ancestors. He decided to crown his eldest son Rama as King. His councillors, Vasishtha and other sages approving, preparations were afoot for the grand coronation. Only prince Bharata was absent, He had, gone on honey moon to his maternal grandfather's court at Kekeya (modern Peshawar) By chance Manthara, (Kaikeyi's old maid servant,) ascended to the top most terrace and was astounded at what she saw The whole city was getting adorned with pandals (shelters) and arches. A passerby said "Why? Haven't you heard that Prince Rama is to be crowned tomorrow?" Trembling with anger as well as old age, Manthara ran down shrieking at Kaikeyi "You are ruined! Rama is going to be crowned tomorrow." Instead of getting agitated, Kaikeyi was pleased and presented a pearl necklace to Manthara. But she threw it down in anger. Familiarity and long service made her bold "You fool! Don't you realize you will be only a servant or worse of Kausalya's hereafter? Your poor son Bharata will be deprived of his right" Manthara raved on like this till at last poor Kaikeyi gave in and decided to make use of the two boons Dasaratha had formerly given to her for saving his life in a battle field. Throwing away her ornaments she flung herself down in a dark room. Quite unsuspecting Dasaratha entered her chambers to announce the glad tidings. He was shocked to see the chamber in disarray and Kaikeyi was sprawling on the floor, her hair dishevelled and fire darting from her eyes. The King tried to pat her but she hissed like a snake "Fie upon you! I want the two boons you once promised. Give me those boons now" Dasaratha replied "By my dear son Rama whom I love more than my life, I swear I will grant you any boon" Kaikeyi now assumed a serious

tone, “Ye Gods! Bear witness to these boons. By the first boon I demand that my son Bharata shall be crowned King and by the second I require that Rama be exiled to the Dandaka forest for fourteen years”.The King fell on the floor thunderstruck. News soon passed around that the coronation was cancelled and Rama was exiled . Prince Rama did not flinch. Seeing his father in pitiable condition, he gently raised him up and announced his determination to leave for the forest at once. Princess Sita had already packed her small kit and was resolved to follow her husband, saying that this was her marriage vow. And Lakshmana got ready his weapons determined to stand guard over his brother and serve them night and day. Meanwhile, a chariot was got ready. They bowed to the aged grieving parents promising to return. Sumanthra the faithful charioteer now took up the reins and coaxed the unwilling horses forward. The rebellious populace blocked the way but Rama assured them that he would return and told them to be loyal to Bharatha. All the women were weeping, even birds stopped singing and amid cries of “ O! Rama! O! Sita!, O peerless Lakshmana!.” the chariot slowly moved out of Ayodhya. The renowned emperor Dasaratha hero of a hundred battles now lay on the ground moaning “ O Rama, Sita, O Lakshmana” and expired in the early hours next day.

The trio reached Sarayu, crossing it while the followers were still asleep and pushed on into the forest, soon they came to a clearing and decided to take some rest. A sound as if a host was approaching was heard and their leader cried “Jai SriRamachandra” bowing low. It was Guha the forest chieftain. He added.“ I have heard Sri Ramchandra, that you have been exiled, Please accept our hospitality for the full term. There is no lack of good things in the forest” Rama was pleased and said with great kindness “Thank you Guha, till now we were four brothers. Hereafter it will be five. However, I can’t stay here as it is too

near Ayodhya. I will not be fulfilling the vow. I must move out” After resting for the night they moved out escorted by Guha and his followers and reached the bank of the Ganges. Guha ferried them over in his boat and prayed “Oh Rama, I m ferrying you over in this boat. Do you also, kindly help me cross the ocean of samsara” Pushing on they met many sanyasins and finally, the great Sage Agasthia who directed them to Panchavati. At Panchavati (Nasik) Lakshmana constructed a Parnasala (Asramam) where they led a delightful life. Five great banyan trees spread a green canopy overhead. The sacred river Godavari, has its source here. Peacocks are seen dancing gaily and white-throated kites circle overhead. In this idyllic background Sita’s delight knew no bounds and they were almost grateful to Kaikeyi for this picnic.

We shall now return to Ayodhya. Speedy messengers were sent to Kekaya to bring Bharata and Satrugna urgently. The journey was full of bad omens. Rushing into the palace, he enquired “Where is my father? Kaikeyi coolly replied, “Your father has gone to the place where all people have to go”. When all the details were told he burst into uncontrollable anger. The funeral obsequies were hastily performed and he announced his resolve to fetch his brother and crown him. A great army accompanied him and their din reached Rama’s ears. “Lakshmana, climb that tree and see who is approaching” said Rama. Lakshmana obeyed and explained that the Ayodhya army was approaching. He was furious, “To arms, To arms, dear brother! Not content with usurping the throne, Bharata is advancing with the army to destroy us. You please guard Sita. I want to crush the enemy single handed.” “Patience, Patience” cried Rama. “Bharata is coming to take us back to Ayodhya.” By this time, Bharata was a bow shot from Rama and shouting “O! brother, brother! rushed towards Rama, crying and blind with tears. He faltered and fell down clutching

Rama's feet. On hearing about Dasaratha's demise, it was now Rama's turn to fall. The funeral rites were hastily performed and now Bharata came to business. "Brother, I will not return without you" To this Rama replied "The heavens may fall, the ganges may roll back, I cannot return!" When things had come to such a pass Bharata had a flash "Rama step on these sandals" Rama did so and prince Bharata reverently bearing them on his head took leave saying to Rama "O! Rama, These sandals will rule for fourteen years and if at the end of it I do not see you, I will immolate myself. Rama too agreed and thus bearing the sandals on his head and shouting "Jai Ram, Jai Sita, Victory to Ram!" the party returned to Ayodhya . Bharata stopped at Nandigram, a village on the outskirts of Ayodhya, installed the sandals on a royal throne and ruled in Rama's name.

Rama, Lakshmana and Sita were now in comparative peace at Panchavati enjoying the idyllic beauty of the Godavari against the backdrop of the blue mountains and thinking of the greatness of Bharata when Surpanakha a rakshasi came there by pure chance. She had spied them from a distance and attracted by the magnificent beauty of Rama had come near. She introduced herself as the sister of the powerful demon king Ravana. Her cousins, Khara and Dushana were the governors of Dandakaranya. If he would marry her, he would win the friendship of Ravana and they could roam over Dandakaranya enjoying sensual bliss. Rama demurred and seeing that Sita was the cause, the rakshasi assumed her gigantic form and made a swoop upon Sita. But Lakshmana ever on the alert flashed his sword and sliced off her nose and breasts. She ran bleeding and roaring and set her cousins Khara and Dushana against Rama. An army of fourteen thousand ferocious bloodthirsty rakshasas set upon Rama. And then ensued a terrible battle. Rama took his stand on a projecting promontory and sent volleys of arrows. They were like rays of the mid day

sun. Rama seemed to be everywhere. In an hour's space the din of battle died. The ground was strewn with dead bodies and vultures circled overhead. Surpanakha saw the havoc she had done. She immediately fled to Lanka and fell like a bolt from the blue before Ravana holding court, shrieking "Revenge! I want Rama's blood. Two brothers Rama and Lakshmana oh! how gloriously handsome, have intruded into our Dandakaranya. Rama's wife Sita is so beautiful. I tried to kidnap her for you and this is the result." She pointed to her bleeding nose. Ravana's cupidity was roused. He threatened and coaxed Maricha to assume the form of a golden deer and draw Rama and Lakshmana out of the ashram so that he could kidnap Sita and bring her to Lanka. Much against his will Maricha as a golden deer gambolled before the ashram. Rama pursued the fleeing deer and losing patience let fly an unerring arrow. The deer fell assuming its true form of a rakshasa and crying "O! Lakshmana, O! Sita! Help me!"

Sita heard the cry and panic stricken cried "O! Lakshmana, go at once and save your brother" Lakshmana protested in vain. Sita was raving. So taking up his bow and arrows he left. Half way up, he met Rama returning after killing Maricha. "O! Lakshmana! Why did you leave Sita alone" cried Rama.

The moment Lakshmana left Sita, Ravana came disguised as a sanyasin begging for alms and when Sita came out he forcibly placed her in Pushpaka Vimanam (flying chariot) and sped towards Lanka. Jatayu the king of Vultures trying to intercept, was cut down.

Bereft of his Kingdom, bereft of his dear wife, Rama bewailed his lot like any ordinary man. Lakshmana tried his best to console him and the two together began to search. Soon they came upon the dying Jatayu who gasped "It is Ravana who has flown southward with Janaki. Alas! I could not save her" Blood

gushed out of his beak and he fell back dead. Embracing him Rama grieved “Alas! How unfortunate are even loyal friends who befriend me!”. He performed the funeral rites praying “Faithful friend of my father! Go to the land of the faithful and enjoy the good fruits”.

The brothers trudged through the thick forest ever watchful with bent bows when all of a sudden they found themselves in the clutches of a huge one eyed giant whose head was in the middle of his body and with arms a mile long. He carried a huge spear on which were stuck an elephant, a lion and a boar. The brothers cut off his hands and legs but the giant would not die. He roared “O! Rama! O! Lakshmana! I know you. I cannot be killed by weapons. This is a boon I have won from Brahma. Bury me in a deep pit.” The brothers did as they were told. From the grave arose the shining form of a gandharva. He said “Once I had been to Indra’s court and cast covetous eyes on apsaras Rambha. Indra divined my thoughts and struck me down promising release and redemption when I meet you , avatar of Vishnu. Janaky is taken to Lanka by the demon Ravana. You must make friends with Sugriva who is hiding in the forests of Kishkinda driven away by his brother Bali. With Sugriva’s help you will recover Janaki”. So saying the gandharva vanished.

Trekking further south, they reached the ashramam of Matanga Maharishi. It was swept clean for years by old Sabari, a low caste woman in the hope of meeting Rama. He granted her moksha (the final release) As they were pushing forward along the banks of the Pampa river, they were observed by Sugriva and his five followers atop a distant cliff. Sugriva was suspicious and asked his follower Sri Hanuman to go and reconnoitre. He cautiously approached but soon threw away all caution and told the whole story of Sugriva’s exile. Rama killed Bali and crowned Sugriva king of all the Vanaras. In return Sugriva promised to find

Sita. A great army of monkeys marched south until they reached the sea. Now a messenger had to be sent to Lanka and the choice fell on Hanuman. Assuming a colossal form and muttering “Ram ! Ram!” he made a tremendous leap, overcame all obstacles and dropped on Lanka. Again assuming a small monkey’s form explored Lanka thoroughly; its fortifications and defense systems and reaching Asoka vanam found Sita in the last extremity of distress . He gently introduced himself.. He humbly presented her Rama’s signet ring; received a token jewel from herself and set Lanka ablaze . He made a return leap dropping before Rama and Lakshmana with the glad news “I have seen Sita!” Rama embraced him with tears in his eyes.

The bridge twenty miles long was ready and the monkey army crossed over. The attack began. Many heroic acts were done by both sides. In the end the rakshasas were annihilated. Ravana and his son and brothers were killed, all except Vibhishana who was pious. Lakshmana crowned him king and the monkey army retreated with Rama and Sita to Ayodhya. It was the last day of the exile and Hanuman was just in time to save Bharata from immolation. Great was the jubilation in Ayodhya. The brothers embracing each other shed tears of joy and the citizens were delirious with joy crying “Where can we find such brotherly love or such devotion to husband as Sita? Victory to Rama, Lakshmana, Bharatha and Satrugna, Jai Ram, Jai Ram” The happiness of the three queen mothers can be easily imagined.

Rama with his brothers reigned for many years. It was Rama Rajyam. No sorrow, no disease, no untimely death. Rains were seasonal and earth was bounteous. Peace and prosperity reigned everywhere. It is said that in the end Rama with all those who would follow him entered the Sarayu, returning to Vaikunta, his eternal abode.

A word of apology is due here, we have described all too briefly the great story of Rama. To all believers it is not a story; it is a way of life. Rama is the great exemplar of how a man should behave as a son, as a husband, as a ruler in prosperity and dire adversity, fully upholding the truth or dharmam (duty) even in the most trying situations. He never said that he was an avatar. “I consider myself only as Dasaratha’s son” But this was only to confirm his identity with the common man. He did not want to distance himself from others. He wanted to teach people that all can become divine. Jai Ram! Jai Ram! Jai Sita Ram!!.

CHAPTER 14

ॐ नमो भगवते वासुदेवाय
ॐ नमो भगवते वासुदेवाय >>

Sk 9. Ch 21 - Slokam 2

Yayati

Much later in the line of the solar dynasty occurs the name of Yayati. He was not the eldest son of his father, the mighty king Nahusha. Still he was selected for his kingly qualities and as the other sons preferred ascetic lives and had become brahmanas.

About this time Vrishaparva the descendant of Prahlada and Bali was the king of the asuras. He had a beautiful daughter named Sarmishta. This spirited princess along with her girl companions was roaming in the woodlands in quest of pleasure and adventure when they came across a broad crystal clear lake. They decided to take a plunge in the cool waters. So divesting their upper garments, they plunged into the water and were having a merry time, splashing the water at one another when Lord Siva with Parvathy was seen passing overhead. Hastily the girls swam to the shore and put on their garments when it was seen that Sarmishta and Devayani daughter of Sukracharya had put on each other's garments by mistake. The princess lost her temper and shouted "Daughter of a beggarly brahmin! How dare you to put on my dress" Devayani retorted "I am the daughter of the great sage Sukracharya. Kings and devas bow down before him. It is my father's spiritual power that sustains your father upon his throne" From words they came to blows and began to scratch and pull as girls do. In her anger Sarmishta pushed over Devayani into a deep well. And they all fled leaving Devayani in the well. Her clothes were torn and some thorny bushes prevented her from drowning. She shouted; getting weaker she began to moan.

By chance Yayati was out hunting and hearing a low moan

from the bottom of the well, peeped in and was surprised to see a girl moaning. Immediately he took off his cloak and threw it down and the kind king bent down and stretching his hand caught hold of her uplifted hands and pulled her out. He was a gallant prince very kind and very handsome. Devayani looked down and said “O! King! You have saved my life. You have given your hand to me and also a dress to wear. Deign to accept me” Yayati was in a fix. How could a kshatriya marry a brahmin girl? But she assured him that her father the great Sukracharya would not object.

Meanwhile Sukracharya had returned and when he heard all that had happened he became angry and retired from the court. Very soon things began to go awry. Bad omens multiplied. The reason was clear. The great sage’s spiritual aura was not there. Vrishaparva immediately ran up and prostrated before Sukracharya. Relenting, the sage said “I shall return on one condition. Your daughter and a hundred other maids must be sent as servants to my daughter” In the interest of his subjects the king agreed and so it was done. The servants and Sarmishta waited upon Devayani. Here there was an unexpected development. Yayati and Sarmishta also fell in love with each other. Of course there was nothing wrong in this as kings had more than one wife in those days. But Devayani was furious with jealousy and fled to her father. The rishi too became unnecessarily angry and cursed Yayati “ Since you have been a slave to passion, may old age and weakness descend upon you at once” Suddenly Yayati found himself old and haggard. He appealed to the old sage “By reducing me to this condition you are depriving your daughter also of all enjoyment” Sukracharya now relented and said “If you can persuade one of your sons to take on this old age and give you his own youth, you will become young again”. Yayati requested each of his sons for this unreasonable exchange. But the youngest Puru agreed. Yayati becoming young again lived a full sensuous life

with Devayani. However, in the end he realised the futility and phantom like nature of all pleasures which have their origin in the mind. And resolving with his queens' approval, exercised an iron control over his mind and uniting it with Brahman once for all attained realization. Puru who had regained his youth was made emperor of the entire world; his brothers being governors of distant provinces.

Sakuntalam

Dushyanta was one of the most famous successors of Puru. Unmarried and very handsome he was out hunting. It was too late to return and so he had to seek shelter in a hermitage. He was received by the young disciples of Kanva Maharishi who had gone out. There Dushyanta saw a maiden of surpassing beauty and lost his heart entirely "Are you an apsaras or goddess. O! beautiful one?" The maiden replied "I am Sakuntala, the daughter of Maharishi Viswamithra and apsaras Menaka. Abandoned by both, I was brought up by Maharishi Kanva as his daughter and who may you be charming prince?" Dushyantha introduced himself. It was love at first sight and they married by the Gandharva form of marriage. Next morning Maharishi Kanva returned. His spiritual insight told him what had happened. He entirely approved of the marriage and blessed the pair. Dushyantha returned to his palace promising to send for her in a befitting manner, but by a quirk of fate entirely forgot Sakuntala. A year passed and she had given birth to a beautiful son. Kanva Maharishi sent her with an escort of his disciples to the king. But he had entirely forgotten his association due to the curse of Durvasa. In this extremity the poor lady called on her mother Menaka who suddenly appeared and carried off her daughter. At the same time a heavenly voice was heard "O! King! She is your lawful wife and the child is your

own heir!" The curse also lifted and Dushyanta now remembered with anguish all that had happened. But it was too late. He accepted his son making him his heir. The child grew up strong and handsome with all princely qualities. This was Bharata the famous emperor of the entire earth and this land is known as Bharath since that time.

This story is the theme of the famous poetic drama "Sakuntalam" acclaimed by even western critics as the greatest romantic drama.

Rantideva

In the Bhagavatham we always find the great kings towards the end of their reigns, giving up all pomp and power and becoming strict sanyasins to attain moksha (final release) But Ranti Deva gave up all power very early, embracing the life of a sanyasin. His family also was with him and they lived on whatever they could get. On one occasion they got a little sweetened rice and were about to share it when a hungry brahmin appeared and begged for food. Ranti Deva at once gave him half. The brahmin went away satisfied and when they sat down to share the remnant a hunter appeared and after the hunter a trader and then only some water was left. Just then an outcaste with his famished dogs appeared "Water! Water! " they craved. Ranti Deva was about to give that water when the gods (Trinity) revealed themselves and took him and his family to higher worlds. Ranti deva is a byword for extreme generosity. He could see god in every one.

[illegible]

Sri Krishna Avataram

Ugrasena Maharaja was ruling at Mathura. A good king but not stern enough. His son Kamsa was a great warrior but too ambitious. He could not wait till his father retired to become king. With the help of some asuric associates he usurped the throne; threw his father into prison and began a reign of terror and oppression.

Kamsa had a cousin sister named Devaki of whom he was very fond. Her marriage had been arranged with Vasudeva, a prince of a powerful clan. At the conclusion of the grand wedding, Devaki and Vasudeva seated in a splendid chariot were being driven to their palace by Kamsa himself when an unseen voice from

above boomed “Kamsa, you fool! You are driving a couple whose eighth son will slay you!” Kamsa at once let go the bridle, jumped down from the chariot and catching hold of the long tresses of the bride, drew his sword. Even in this extremity Vasudeva kept his cool and calmly assured Kamsa that he would present every son as soon as it was born, to Kamsa, to be disposed of as he pleased. Kamsa reflected. Vasudeva was known to be a man of his word. He let go his hold and allowed them to proceed.

By the end of the year a son, bright as the morning star was born. True to his word, Vasudeva carried the child in his arms and laid it before Kamsa. Even Kamsa’s heart relented “Vasudeva I am glad you have kept your word. But I have fear only from the eighth child, so take this child back and cherish it” Vasudeva gladly took it back but was not too glad. The devas got alarmed. Kamsa was softening; their plans would go awry. So they requested Sri Narada to set matters right. The Devarishi smiled. Approaching Kamsa he said “O! King! You may have made a mistake because any of the eight children can be made the eighth by changing the origin of counting.” Kamsa thanked Narada for pointing out the error and immediately went after Vasudeva, snatched the child from him and dashed it on a stone that was conveniently near by.

This went on six times. Six babies were brutally killed. Devaki conceived for the seventh time hoping against hope that this one at least would be saved somehow.

The scene now shifts to Brindavan, a pastoral village not far from Mathura. Dairy farming was the only means of livelihood of these sturdy people. The lush meadows, thick with green grass were ideal grazing grounds for cattle. The village literally overflowed with milk and curds and honey which form the basis of wealth. Nandagopa was their prince and Yasoda was his consort. Kamsa’s reign was becoming unbearable to good people. Lord Vishnu decided that the time was ripe for his

avatar (descending to earth) and requested his inseparable companion and other self Adishesha to precede him and enter the womb of Devaki. Then, turning to Mahadevi Loka maya who shrouds him from the gaze of the irreverent and impious he said ” Ho! Devi Mahamaya! You have also a role to play in this drama. Remove my brother from Devaki’s womb and transplant him in Rohini at Brindavan and yourself enter Yasodas body. Do this and as a reward for this great service, humanity will worship you as Durga, Kali, Maya with offerings of flowers and rice sweetened with jaggery, and honey” Bowing low Mahamaya departed.

Next day, news spread that Devaki had aborted. Kamsa, now knew for certain that the next would be his killer. He redoubled the guard and put Devaki and Vasudeva in chains. Now Vishnu himself entered Vasudeva’s body. He shone like the sun and felt an inexplicable elation. The elation spread to Devaki also and both felt that their misery would soon end. Kamsa was now getting nervous and gave strict instructions to the guards to inform him as soon as the child was born. He was having disturbing dreams portending death. The devas with Brahma and Siva were hovering above with garlands and flowers singing songs of praise and welcome.

Brahma’s Hymn of Praise

Hail! Lord of the universe, Truth incarnate

Thou art the Truth three fold

True now, in the past and in the future

Like a great tree Thou art, with roots in Prakriti

The four Purusharthas thy saps; the vital airs thy extension

Hunger, thirst, sorrow, infatuation

Old age and death thy constitution

The mind, intellect, ego its branches

And Jiva and Easwara the two birds that rest

Thy feet the boat to cross Maya

Hearing your stories, listening to songs about you and serving others is the way to your presence and release from every affliction. Singing like this they departed.

The planets assumed favourable positions. A pleasant breeze wafted heavenly odours. A gentle rain revived all living creatures, moving and unmoving. Rivers rolled limpid and clear and even thunder was muffled keeping time with the waves of the ocean. Holy rishis chanted mantras as Devaki gave birth to her divine son. Vasudeva saw the divine child with four arms bearing the conch, lotus, mace and chakram, adorned already with priceless necklaces and kaustubham, wearing a jewelled crown, lotus eyed and smiling at the bewildered parents. He told them that this was not the first time he was born as their son. Even in previous births he had been their son because of their great purity and tapas. He asked Vasudeva to carry him to Gokulam, deposit him at Yasoda's side, take the baby girl he would find there and bring it to Mathura. So saying the child resumed a baby's form. Vasudeva implicitly followed the directions. Placing the baby in a basket he reverently carried him on his head and stepped out.

Then wonder after wonder followed. The iron chains binding him and Devaki had fallen apart and now the great gates flew open. A deep sleep overpowered the guards who lay snoring. There was mild thunder and a slight drizzle, but he was not getting wet. Looking up he saw a great hooded serpent protecting him from the rain. Gokulam was some seven or eight miles away and he had to cross the great river Jamuna which was already in spate.

Not knowing what to do Vasudeva with his precious burden, just pushed on until he reached the brink of the roaring flood. Then O! Wonder of wonders; the roar subsided; the waters became calm and Vasudeva was emboldened to cross. It was at first ankles deep, then knee deep, then waist deep and there it stopped. Vasudeva waded on and on but the river continued to be only waist deep and the hooded serpent was covering him like a huge umbrella over head. Reaching the other bank he continued his journey. The glowworms lighted the path and he reached Gokulam. Not a dog barked. He entered a well lighted house. Men were sleeping in the open verandahs. Inside a matron was sleeping with a newly born baby by her side. Gently removing the baby girl Vasudeva put his own child there and regretfully traced his way back and nobody was any wiser about this baby transfer. Returning to Mathura in the dead of night he found the prison gates opening automatically as before and deposited gently the baby girl by the side of Devaki. Sorely she missed her baby son but realized that this was all his play and fondled the baby girl as if it was her own. The baby however began to cry so loud that the sleeping guards awoke with a start and some of them dashed off to inform Kamsa. Trembling with rage and fear the villain snatched the baby by its legs and was swinging it around when slipping from his hands she sprang into the air and assuming her own beautiful but awe inspiring form with eight arms, carrying weapons, said in a ringing voice "Fool, you have killed many innocents in vain. Sri Hari, your enemy is growing up elsewhere". So saying the Devi vanished. Kamsa fell back abashed "Alas! What a fool I have been! Even gods tell falsehood. Alas! My poor sister! How I have wronged you! It is all due to fate. Kindly forgive me for my cruelty". Kamsa's repentance was short lived. Back at his court, he was surrounded by his asuric courtiers Chanura and others "The devas are cowards who have fled from the shower of your deadly arrows. Vishnu

sometimes overcomes our leaders by mere stratagem. He derives his strength from the oblations offered to him by some traitorous brahmins and rishis. If we have your permission we will exterminate these vermin". Kamsa agreed and ordered them to destroy Brahmins and temples. The villains obeyed with glee and torched the places of worship and cottages even in far off Gokulam. And one bright devil suggested "Why not we kill all new born children I have a sister Poothana by name who will do it with pleasure" "Agreed" roared Kamsa and Poothana started on her deadly mission.

At Gokulam the month long rejoicings at the birth of an heir to their chief had not yet subsided. It was as if a brilliant star had risen. The baby was so beautiful with its lotus like eyes and ruby lips and its complexion of a fresh rose, one could not take one's eyes off it. There was an endless stream of gopis (cowherd maidens) coming to pay their respects. The lowing cows yielded milk in greater profusion. It seemed as if Sri Lakshmi, the goddess of plenty had descended upon the village and the simple villagers believed that all this was due to the child. Yasoda really believed that this was her son for she was unconscious at the time of her delivery and knew not its sex. Nandagopa her husband had gone to Mathura to pay the annual taxes of butter and curds. He used this opportunity to renew his friendship with his old friend Vasudeva. The two were great friends. The talk naturally turned to the arrival of the new baby. "Even though you are past the prime god has given you a fine son. Cherish him with care for the times are bad. Return home straight before anything happens." Nandagopa too had an uneasy feeling of some impending danger, so taking a hasty leave he departed.

Poothana was approaching Gokulam. Using her magic arts she had converted herself into a handsome gopi and bearing a golden tray with flowers entered the village with mincing steps

and humming a tune. No one dreamt of stopping her. Entering boldly Yasoda's open house she gazed at the enchanting baby, hesitated for a moment, a shade passing over her face. But it was only for a moment "I must be loyal to Kamsa or he will destroy me". So, steeling herself she took the sleeping child and clasped it to her poisoned breasts. With eyes still half closed the baby began to suck. After a few seconds she tried to free herself from the still fiercely sucking baby but could not free herself. The rakshasi resumed her true form, thrashing the ground with her hands and feet fell prone on the earth like a tree uprooted, the baby still sucking at her breast. She fell with a terrible cry whose reverberations reached Kamsa's frightened ears.

All the village now collected round the dead body of the rakshasi trying to extricate the baby that was playing on the top quite unconcerned. Very soon Nanda also arrived and together they extricated the baby. Then they made a bonfire of the rakshasi's body and strangely enough, a sweet perfume spread over the entire place. The baby had sucked out all the poison from her system and it now burned like camphor and sandalwood. Just because she had given milk, albeit poisoned, to the divine child she was granted Moksha (final release) How much more must be the reward of those who worship and offer sweet payasam to him!

Prior to the birth of a baby to Yasoda, Rohini had given birth to a fine son, fair as the moon, brightening the entire village with his brilliance. He was the avatar of Adishesha, Vishnu's support and other self. The two babies seemed to be the foci around which the entire village revolved. Nanda began to prepare for the naming ceremony and just then the great astrologer saint Garga arrived. He was the family purohit (priest) of the Vrishnis and Nanda now requested him to conduct the ceremony. Garga agreed but cautioned that it must be done with the utmost secrecy. Otherwise, Kamsa

would get wind of this and he would send his minions to kill the babies. So, the naming was done with the utmost secrecy. The elder, Rohini's son was named "Rama" because he pleased everyone and the younger, Yasoda's son was named Krishna as he attracted every one. The elder was also called Balarama, as the baby was extraordinarily sturdy.

The gopas and gopis were simple hard working people. When there was sunshine, they had to dry their grains or grind them into flour, churn the curds and collect the butter, split the logs for firewood and so on. Yasoda, Nanda's wife, was also engaged in these activities laying down the sleeping baby in the shade cast by a cart that was fortuitously standing by. As Yasoda was absent too long, the baby became restless throwing up its tiny legs. The feet coming in contact with the cart, shattered it into a thousand fragments. The gopis rushing to the place, took the baby in their arms and finding it unhurt and smiling, thanked the gods for its miraculous escape. The fragments were found to be pieces of a dead asura's body. The cowherd boys who were watching from a distance assured them that Krishna had kicked the asura shattering him to pieces. But the elders did not believe it; they thought it was just children's prattle.

Trinavarttha

Once Yasoda was fondling her son as usual when she felt an unusual weight. Reeling under the weight she placed the child on the floor. Suddenly with a screaming noise a fierce whirlwind struck the place. Columns of sand were whirling round and round pelting everyone with sharp edged stones. Trees were pulled up by the root and even animals were lifted and whirled around. People ran hither and thither for shelter. It was Trinavarttha, Kamsa's emissary, who assuming the form of a whirlwind was

sweeping the village to lift Krishna. He lifted the child and was speeding with him to Mathura but quickly felt it was too heavy and tried to shake him off. In vain, the asura struggled to throw him off. The child had clasped him by the throat and he fell dead like a mountain cleft by lightning and thunder. The storm suddenly subsided and the gopas found Krishna playing in the debris. The gopis could only thank the unseen gods for this miraculous escape.

The babies now began to crawl on their knees and did enough mischief to keep all the gopies on their toes. They could not and did not want to take their eyes off the children. Even when they danced and played they carried him on their hips by turns and there was great competition for this pleasure. From crawling on their knees the children rapidly reached the next stage of toddling and walking erect with unsteady steps. There was no end to the fun and frolic. The gopis would make him dance offering a piece of cake or a little butter as prize. He who was making the world or even the universe dance, was now dancing like a puppet to the tunes of the simple milk maids! Sometimes he would pull the calves by their tails and enjoy a tug of war. Growing bigger Krishna organized the boys into gangs making forays into the dairies kept by grown up ladies. The complaint became general “Yasoda, your boy is stealing our butter. They break the pot and drink the curds as it pours out. Not content with this, they take the butter and feed the monkeys and kittens that follow them always!” Yasoda protested “Why should my son steal butter when we have plenty of it in our house. If you can catch him red handed I will punish him”. The gopis murmured but they could not get angry with Krishna. One enterprising gopi laid a ruse. She kept the doors partly open, placed the butter pans deliberately within reach of little Krishna and lay in wait. Sure enough, Krishna and his gang (which included the son of the owner herself) appeared, filled their hands and mouth with butter. They were about to beat a

retreat when the owner lady pounced on little Krishna, caught him by the hand and thus catching him reached his house shouting “Now, Yasoda! What do you say to this?” Yasoda coming out said “Why this is not Krishna” The gopi who was dragging Krishna, now looked down and saw that it was her own son! Quite abashed, she let go her son, while Krishna laughed loud from inside his house and Yasoda frowned.

Yasoda’s Vision

As days passed, Krishna’s mischief waxed. He would release the calves before milking time and when questioned, would make faces. He was the beloved leader of all the boys and girls who blithely followed him in all his pranks. On one occasion they complained to his mother “Yasoda Ma! This Krishna has eaten mud!” Immediately catching hold of Krishna Yasoda asked “Krishna! Did you eat mud? All these boys and even your brother says so” Krishna stoutly protested. “All right open your mouth” said Yasoda holding him firmly. The child opened its little mouth and wonder of wonders Yasoda gazed and saw the heavens and stars; mountains and rivers; living creatures big and small and finally her own village and herself looking into the open mouth of another little Krishna. Yasoda fainted. Krishna relented and cast his yoga maya over her. Slowly opening her eyes Yasoda was once more her normal self back in this world of maya; in her own village and she entirely forgot her experience

Krishna Is Bound To A Wooden Mortar

After setting her servants to various tasks Yasoda was herself engaged in churning curds. She was rather a large sized lady wearing many bangles and a girdle. As she churned, the

bangles made a jingling musical sound and at the same time little Krishna was clasping her round the neck begging to be suckled. Because of her intense affection milk was oozing from her breasts. She stopped the churning and turning round, took the child in her lap and began to suckle it. The feeding was only half over when she heard the milk pot in the kitchen boiling over. Hastily putting the half fed child on the floor she rushed to the kitchen. Krishna was annoyed. Getting up, he snatched the churning rod and broke the pot. flooding the room with curd and butter. The ever ready kittens and monkeys were lapping up happily. Not content with this mischief Krishna collected some butter in his little hands; went to an adjoining room and sitting on an upturned wooden mortar, was throwing bits of butter to the crows and squirrels. Yasoda returning from the kitchen, observed all the mischief. The mother smiled but pretended to be angry and taking up a cane caught hold of the little rogue threatening to chastise him; but the child now began to sob. Tears rolled down his cheeks and Yasoda found it hard to keep up her pretension of anger. But the child had to be punished some how. She took up the rope used for churning and began to bind Krishna to the wooden mortar. But winding round and round she found it two inches short. So she attached another piece of rope but that too proved two inches too short. This went on for some time. Always it was two inches short. Some other Gopis who had gathered round to witness the tamasha began to laugh. Poor Yasoda was getting tired trying to bind the infinite. The Lord, now took pity on his mother and allowed himself to be bound, teaching the world that he can be bound only by love. Leaving Krishna like that, Yasoda went back to her work.

Liberation Of Nalakubera And Manigriva

Out in the compound stood two giant Arjuna Trees like twins. The child crawling on all fours and dragging the wooden mortar behind slowly worked his way through the cleft. The mortar turned crosswise and got stuck between the trees. Krishna tugged, the trees began to shiver and with a mighty prolonged roar, fell prone flat and two shining celestials materialized with folded hands and bent heads. They began to sing

“O! Krishna, Maha yogin Vasudeva

You have created all this manifest and unmanifest

They are thy body; Thou art time eternal

Thou alone art Prakriti and its gunas

Budhi, ego, mind, senses thy modifications

None by itself can comprehend the whole

Even as clouds caused by the sun, hide him

Thou art the supreme Lord, now manifest

For the prosperity of all the world. Salutations!

Singing thus they departed to their world.

Their Previous History

These gandharvas were the sons of Kubera, guardian of all the wealth. Intoxicated by wealth, they had become blind to decency and all the ills that this body is heir to . Wild with drink and accompanied by their women folk they had plunged into holy ganges Casting off their clothes they were disporting themselves like elephants when Devarishi Sri Narada passed that way. Seeing

the sage from a distance, the ladies immediately snatched their garments and clothed themselves; but not so the two gandharvas. The great sage did not become angry. He was rather sad to see the effect of wealth

Alas! Whose is this body?
Is it the Father's or Mother's?
Does it belong to, the worms or to fire
Wealth makes him vain and
Cruel to fellow creatures and
Thoughtless to their sufferings, for such,
Poverty is the all powerful panacea.
So, I shall deprive them of all their wealth
Let them be trees and when
They come in contact with Lord Krishna
Will regain their form and wisdom.
To fulfill the Rishi's words the Lord had
To play this part.

Trek To Brindavan

Hearing the sound of the falling trees the gopas rushed to the place and were relieved to find the child unhurt. Some stray cowherd boys who had witnessed all this told them that the trees fell because Krishna had tugged at the rope and further two resplendent celestials appeared and worshipped Krishna. But the elders dismissed all this and thought it was only children's prattle.

Days passed. Rama and Krishna played with boys of their own age. The gopi girls were mischievous. They would tauntingly say “Krishna, you cannot dance”. Krishna would protest and begin to dance, throwing his arms about like a marionette. “Krishna! You cannot lift this stone”. Krishna would again protest and lift the stone with great apparent effort and even walk a few steps, to the great merriment of the girls— demonstrating that the Lord will do anything for a devotee, even dancing to their tune.

Krishna And The Old Fruit Vendor

An old woman, a fruit seller, was one day trying to sell fruits without much success. It was evening and she was tired. “Apples, Apples, Mangoes, Grapes!” she cried but no one wanted any. The child Krishna observed it and called “Hey! Mother! Give me some fruits!” The tired old woman immediately put down her basket and filled the child’s palm with fruits. In return she had to be paid some grain. Asking her to wait the child went in filled his palms with grain and returned but the grains had spilled and only a few grains were left. But the child innocently placed it in her basket. The old woman smiled at the child’s innocence and its good nature and filled its palms with the choicest fruits. There was no more hawking. When, after returning to her cottage she opened the basket. O! Wonder of wonders! It was filled with the costliest pearls and diamonds!

In spite of these miracles the elders were getting anxious. “Our village is becoming the target of evil spirits. First it was Poothana; then the whirlwind and fire; and now the arjuna trees. All along the Lord has saved us. We must not ignore these warnings or tempt fortune further . Let us move to a safer place. Brindavan

is a safer place and the location too is good. The river Yamuna is nearby. There are broad meadows and hill slopes lush with grass to feed our herds". All the gopas agreed and the trek began.

The stalwarts with bows and arrows marched in front; with trumpets and bugles and flutes others followed, and they were followed by the aged and the infirm and the womenfolk and Yasoda and Rohini in chariots came last. Reaching an open space they pitched their tents in a half moon. The cowherds were delighted at the delightful prospects all around and settled down to their usual occupation of grazing the cows and milking while the happy children ranged farther with their slings and pipes. They played with the calves, wrestled with the older ones; bellowed like bulls or imitated the larks. They grimaced at the monkeys and raced with the birds. Days passed in this delightful manner. Rama and Krishna were growing firmer and stronger every day when one day an asura disguised as a bull calf entered the fold. Krishna, at once, detected him and catching hold of the pseudo calf's hind legs and tail, whirled him round and round until he died gasping and then threw him up so high that when he fell, he hit a kapitha tree shedding all its fruits.

Bakasura The Crane

Bakasura, another ally of Kamsa assuming the shape of a huge crane was sitting atop a cliff as if he was another cliff. The cowherd boys threw stones at him out of curiosity but disregarding all of them, he came straight to Krishna and gobbled him up. The children were stunned and gazed in speechless surprise. The Asura felt as if he had swallowed a chunk of burning coal and coughed it out. Springing up quite unhurt Krishna caught the bird by its beak and tore it asunder as if it was a blade of grass and that was the end of Bakasura.

As the boys narrated the events of the day to the elders in the evening, they wondered. Said Nanda, “What the great sage Garga said is coming true. So many evil spirits have come and they have all been destroyed. Surely, this child is divine!”

The Salvation of Aghasura

One day, the cowherd boys decided to have a grand buffet dinner in the green lawns inside the forest. They rose early and gathering the victuals from their mothers and taking their bugles and flutes and with Krishna in their midst, left with their herds for the forest. As if the gold ornaments were not enough they had adorned themselves with garlands of wild flowers. Sticking feathers in their head gear they danced with the peacocks, raced with the shadows of over flying swans, mimicked the birds, pulled the monkeys by their tails, shouted at the cave mouths mocking the echoes. The Lord of the universe inaccessible to even yogis thus rollicked freely with these simple cowherd boys. Who can fathom the merit that must have been earned by these high souled cowherd boys?

Impatient at the felicity of these simple cowherd boys Aghasura ,brother of Poothana and Kamsa’s friend decided to take revenge He assumed the form of a python and lay across their path quite motionless. It was so huge, many miles long, Its upper jaw was touching the clouds and lower jaw grazing the earth. The presence of Krishna had made the cowherd boys fearless and fool hardy . Clapping their hands they entered the cavernous jaws with their flocks. Krishna who was closely watching also entered the jaws. The devas above, trembled while the demons rejoiced. The python snapped its jaws sure of its prey. Krishna the great yogi suddenly enlarged himself effectively throttling the python. Its eyes began to roll, its tail lashed about, its head dashed

on the ground and it died. The boys with their flock trooped out hysterically singing the praises of their saviour and were astonished to see a trail of light in the sky slowly moving down and entering Krishna's body. Thus even Aghasura who came to kill was saved by the Lord. How much more will he be willing to save those who are good !

This incident was narrated by the cowherd boys to their elders, one year after its occurrence. Parikshit knew that this too was due to the Lord's Maya, yet to make sure, he requested Suka to clear this apparent mystery. Suka Maharishi replied "Your question is quite appropriate, for devout people, discussion about divine stories is ever pleasant even as vain talk about women is pleasing to libertines. I shall reveal to you what happened for there is no secret that one may withhold from devoted disciples."

After rescuing the children from the python, they reached the river banks and prepared for dinner with the victuals they had brought. They sat in a circle with Krishna at the centre. Every one wanted to see Krishna face to face and the wonder was that they were all facing him! They looked like lotus petals with the pericarp at the centre. They offered each other and Krishna the delicacies their mothers had made for them; cracked innocent jokes laughing and making others laugh. It was a sight for the gods to see!

Standing at the centre with flute and horn

Stuck in the girdle, facing all at once

With balls of rice and curds and pickles

Stuck in different fingers the Lord stood

And heavenly hordes from above gazed in wonder.

He who partakes all sacrifices.

The Lord! He dined!

One day as usual Krishna left for the woods early morning with his friends and all their flocks of calves. While Krishna and his friends reclined in an open space the calves penetrated deep into the forest. The boys became anxious for their calves and Krishna, though he had only half finished his meal, offered to go and bring them back. Krishna followed their track but could not find them anywhere. He returned to the base camp but the boys too had vanished. At once, the all knowing Lord knew that Brahma was the cause of all this mischief.

He immediately created or rather himself became all the calves with their different skins and marks and became the cowherd lads with their bugles and slings and returned in the evening to the village creating the usual hubbub and noise. Each calf entered into its own shed. The cows licked them with greater affection, the udders oozing milk. The cowherd boys were embraced by their mothers with unusual overflowing affection. And they all left for grazing next day and every day after that, as if nothing had happened. Only difference, was the inexplicable, inordinate affection the gopis felt for their children who were all Krishnas now.

One day the Krishna calves were grazing nearby while their mother cows were grazing at the top of a hill. Suddenly the cows became mad with uncontrollable affection for the Krishna calves and bellowing loud and with tails raised they galloped towards their calves overturning the gopas who vainly tried to control them. They were very much annoyed and ashamed at their inability to control these usually gentle creatures. It was almost one year now and Rama became suspicious. Why should the gopis show such extraordinary affection towards their sons and the cows to their calves. Soon he divined the truth. Brahma came to see the

result of his handiwork. He was dismayed to see the little children as little Krishnas with garlands and peacock feathers and the calves too were little Krishnas. His egoism gone; he bowed with all his four heads in all directions again and again. Wherever he looked he saw only Krishna and looking farther, he saw different spheres (world systems) emanating from Krishna's body and hurtling through space and other Brahmas presiding. Utterly confused he fell prostrate and his diadems kissing the feet of the Lord before him broke into a song.

Brahma's Vision

I bow to thee Lord, thy body is of condensed light
With thy garlands, flute and wand
These you have assumed for your devotees
And to bless me too by removing all pride and ego
Vast learning and penance are riddled with needless pain
Most effective are the ways of these simple gopis
And they are pleasant too
I am but a spark of that mighty flame thou art
Pardon me my pride. Even as a mother
Pardons the kicks of her unborn babe.
Narayana thou art the soul and support
Of all beings. I am so feeble and thou so great
Through thine every pore swarm forth spheres
Each as big or bigger than this earth
Our reason fails; but we can feel that
You are beyond reason, you are too real

Now permit me to retire Lord and May this
scene I saw today give me strength
And power to do your work.

Parikshit's Doubt

The king now asked Sri Suka “O! Maharshi! How is it that everyone felt such great love for Krishna? Even more than they felt for their own children?”. The Rishi replied “O! Rajan! To every one his own soul is dearer than anything else. Krishna is the universal soul and that is why he is dearest to everyone though they do not know the real reason because of the Lord’s Maya. If crossing the Maya, one realizes the Truth that He is everything and everywhere then this samsara (transient world) is easily crossed. He who reads this story of Krishna will attain all purposes of life“

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The Death of Dhenuka

As they were past the sixth year Rama and Krishna were entrusted with the grazing of the bigger cows. The lawns and hill slopes and forests were in full bloom. A cool breeze, fragrant with the scent of the blooming lotus flowers in the ponds fanned their cheeks. A veritable paradise was this Brindavan. Krishna said “O! Brother, these trees laden with fruits bend before you in obeisance and the waving branches beckon you to their shade. The larks are singing your praise and look at the deer! Are they not looking at you with the eyes of gopis in adoration! Surely these cuckoos that sing your praises must be sages born again because they wanted to be here to adore you. The very grass you tread is thicker.”

Thus Krishna moved about among the trees which bloomed afresh in his presence

Cracking jokes, laughing and making others laugh
Sudama and other gopas, all his bosom friends
Cried “Krishna! O! Krishna! Inhale this smell
How Sweet! It is from the palm trees yonder
We yearn to taste its fruits but dare not go near
Dhenuka, the cannibal guards it. How sweet are the fruits!
Rama laughed loud and entering the grove
Shook the trees with such force

The sweet fruits fell in showers covering the ground
The gopas had their fill; their eyes beamed
But Dhenuka the ass came galloping
And like the ass he was, reared on his haunches
to strike at them. But Balarama caught him
by the legs and whirling him fast and faster
threw him at the tree which broke
And that hit another palm and that another
Covering the entire ground with honeyed fruits
The happy gopas had their fill and
Thanked Rama and Krishna all the more
The cows and calves now grazed in peace
And as night approached they returned to the village
Anointed themselves with unguents and oils
Had their bath and a sumptuous meal
and rested for the night.
Early next morning Krishna rose and bathed
And performed the morning rites and
With the flocks and without Balarama
Went out to the river bank.

Kaliya Mardanam

A black serpent of gigantic size, named Kaliya had taken up its residence in a cavern at the bottom of river Yamuna. It had

poisoned the water and the black fumes curling up withered the leaves of a kadamba tree on the bank. No fish could live in that poisoned water and even birds flying overhead, died and fell. The cows drinking the water were stretched dead on the bank and even the gopas who had unwittingly entered the water were lying unconscious practically dead. Krishna, reaching the banks alone, took in the situation at a glance. Girding up his clothes he mounted the withered kadamba tree. It sprouted at his touch and the cows and gopas too revived as his life giving glance fell on them.

Then taking a mighty leap he plunged
The waters sprayed and overflowed the banks
A hundred feet and closed over his devoted head
The gopas and cows stared distraught
Hot tears flowing down their cheeks
But they knew not the power of his mighty arms
Or his yogic powers. For a moment he wrestled
The deadly serpent tightened his coils
But the Lord in a trice shrunk himself
And the coils slipped and like the full moon
He emerged and began to dance
And what a dance! The celestials
With pipe and drum were dancing overhead
With his hoods all dripping poison
Kaliya wriggled and tried to bite
But ere it could bite, Krishna's foot was down

The serpent hissed and raised another hood
Again Krishna's foot was down and the
Waters glowed with rainbow colours
His anger and spite, thus trampled out
Kaliya began to pray with his numerous wives and kin,
around.

The Women's Prayer

Mercy O! Lord! Mercy
This wicked lord of ours has
but got his deserts. It is his nature
Serpents are cruel and angry by nature
And You are the lord of nature.
Are you not merciful It behoves you
to forgive the sins. And we, the wives
and these the children have done no wrong.
Save us from widow hood, kind Lord and
Let the serpent live.
Krishna stopped his dance and relieved from the terrific
trampling the serpent said:
"Lord! Pardon, Pardon
We are but creatures of darkness
Nature has made us cruel and vengeful
And you, the Lord of nature, have made us all
Pardon or destroy us all as you will.

Willingly, we accept whatever you ordain.

Krishna said, “ Leave these waters and go to the island Ramanaka and live in peace. Garuda will not trouble you there. The waters of Yamuna will be pure and nectar like to cows and cowherds and all good people who may be coming in future. And you must promise one thing more. He who reads this with faith should be free from snake bite in future”. The serpent promised and left.

Previous Story Of Kaliya

Kaliya with other serpents used to live in the island of Ramanaka. All the serpents used to make presents and sacrifices to Garuda (Lord’s mount) to get immunity from his attack. But Kaliya proud of his strength, alone resisted. He even dared to misappropriate the presents made by the other serpents. A fight ensued and Kaliya had to flee. Luckily there was a cavern in the yamuna immune to Garuda’s attack. This immunity was obtained in the following manner. Garuda used to attack and eat all the fish whenever he could find them. In despair they appealed to sage Sabari whose ashram was on the banks of Yamuna. The sage out of his mercy placed an interdict “Who ever catches the fish in the cavern will perish. My curse is true, it will stand.” So Garuda would not go near that cavern any more. Taking advantage of this interdict, Kaliya made it his habitat until he was sent back to Ramanaka.

The Summer Season — Pralamba’s Attack

Balarama was a silent witness of Krishna’s exploits. He was not too excited as he knew Krishna’s powers. The gopas and gopis were actually incarnations of devas and devis but they

were not aware of Krishna's true nature. Carrying him shoulder high they brought him to the village amid great rejoicings. It was summer; the sun was high but because of the trees and luxuriant foliage it looked like spring. A cool breeze laden with the scent of opening water lilies and lotuses took away the heat and birds of many hues flitting hither and thither among the tree tops seemed to sing hymns in praise of their Maker. Next morning after the day's ablutions the boys headed by Krishna and Balarama again entered the forest. They were in a playful mood. Dividing themselves in batches they played many ingenious games such as the blind men's buff or catch the thief or wrestling matches at which most of them were experts. The vanquished should carry the victor on his shoulders and set him down at the foot of a huge banyan tree. There were two parties, one led by Balarama and the other by Krishna. The demon Pralamba had entered the group unnoticed in the shape of a cowherd boy. He easily allowed himself to be defeated by Balarama and had to carry Balarama on his shoulders. Krishna was defeated by Sudama and Krishna gladly bore him on his shoulders. The demon's plan was to run away with Balarama out of Brindavan altogether. Krishna had earlier pointed out to Balarama and he was prepared. The Asura carrying Balarama ran beyond the tree and assuming his real form, rose in the air. Balarama tightened his grip on the Asura's throat. His eyes began to bulge. Balarama gave him such a fierce knock. He fell vomiting blood. The gopas who had come rushing to help, lifted Balarama on their shoulders and returned singing his praises.

Saved From The Forest Fire

As the cowherds were gradually recovering from this confusion, the cows had strayed deeper into the forest. Krishna then played on his flute and the cows responded by bellowing.

Somehow the gopas rejoined their flock but another fearful disaster faced them. Due to the extreme heat the tall grass had caught fire. It spread rapidly enveloping the gopas and their flock. In this dire calamity the gopas could only pray. “Save us your dependents Lord! Otherwise we perish!” Krishna told them to close their eyes. They did so and Krishna the great yogi, drank the forest fire. “Now open your eyes” said Krishna. They did so and lo! the fire had gone. The gopas were astounded at this miracle and said “It is certain that Krishna and Balarama are gods! And they returned to the village dancing to the enthralling music issuing from the flutes.

The Rainy Season

After the intense summer, the rainy season set in. The sky was suddenly overcast with dark bluish clouds interspersed with lightning even as Brahman is covered by the gunas of prakriti. Whatever water they had collected during eight months of heat the clouds now released at the proper time for the benefit of the people. The great clouds lashed by the wind released their water to the delight of all people as the king releases the taxes collected for the benefit of subjects. Just as person who had become lean after great austerities becomes plump again when they are over, the earth again became soft and fertile after the rains. As the glowworms shine in cloudy nights clouding the stars even so false philosophies raise their head obscuring godly faith in this age of Kali. Hearing the music of the rain, frogs began their rhythmic croak even as the disciples do when the Acharya has ended his lesson.

The little streams till now unnoticed, now overflowed their banks cluttered with rubbish even as the wealth of a foolish man in prosperous times. The ground covered with green grass and

flowers of various hues resembled the attire of men in prosperity. The rich harvest brought pleasure to the poor farmers and anxiety about their disposal to the rich. All the creatures on land and water wore a festive appearance as devotees do while adoring the Lord. As the rivers entered the sea they became agitated with waves as novices entering Tapas are agitated by turbulent feelings. The mountains though battered by the rains were motionless and unaffected even as those good people whose attention is fixed on the Lord are not affected even when surrounded and attacked by misfortunes. The pathways, covered by weeds and grass became indistinct even as the Vedas became unclear through neglect and lack of study in course of time. The lightning deserted those great benefactors, the clouds just as unfaithful women desert even good husbands. Just as the stringless rainbow manifests in the sky the Lord without attributes manifests in the world of attributes.

The moon is hidden by the clouds which are revealed by the moon's light only and similarly the Atman is hidden by the 'I' sense which can be revealed by Atman's light alone. As peacocks suffering from drought dance with delight at the sight of clouds portending rain so too householders suffering from the miseries of the world, rejoice at the coming of the saints bringing the word of God. Drinking water through their feet (roots) the parched trees sprouted shoots and flowers just as the ascetics who had become thin and famished during Tapas, again became full and prosperous through service to the Lord. Though the waters were disturbed and receding in summer, the water birds continued to stay due to their greed for fish just as, unmindful of their misfortunes worldly people still persist in their luckless acts.

The torrential rains washed away the banks and bunds just as the vedic rules and laws are broken by atheists and unbelievers. Driven by the wind the clouds released the rain for people's benefit

as kings release the taxes for their subjects , guided by the advice of sages.

In this rainy season the forests were full of heavily laden palm trees and rose apples . Krishna, Balarama and cowherd boys entered it with intent to play. The cows with heavy udders, moving slowly, quickened their pace, hearing Krishna's flute. The forest dwellers too were happy; the trees gave them all they wanted and there were many cosy caves around. Entering them they put the curd rice and pickles on leaf plates, spread on dry slabs and dined to their hearts content; the cows lying a little away chewing the cud.

Thus ended the rainy season.

Autumn

The Autumn season now dawned with clear skies and a mild wind. The lotus bloomed everywhere in ponds whose waters were crystal clear again, like the minds of yogis practicing yoga. The earth was free of mud and vegetation and became pure and more green as devotion to Krishna purifies the mind. Deprived of water the clouds shone in white brilliance like the minds of sages who have shed the three sins of longing for wealth, sons and felicities. The creatures of the deep were unaware of the gradual drying up of water even as family men are unconscious of their life span decreasing day-by-day. Slowly the ground gave up its moisture and the leafy bowers their greenery as wise men give up their egoism in perishing things.

The ocean became calm as autumn advanced as a wise man becomes calm when he advances in spirituality. The farmers put up bunds in fields to prevent water flowing away as yogis conserve their energy by preventing them from flowing out in vain. The heat of the autumn sun was removed by the cool rays of

the moon just as pride in the physical beauty was removed by Krishna. The starlit cloudless sky shone at night as the satvic mind is illuminated by the words of the Vedas. In the broad expanse of the sky the moon shone attended by the stars even as Krishna encircled by the vrishnis (cowherds) shone on earth.

The forest breeze brought relief to the gopas but not to the gopis whose hearts were stolen by Krishna. All flowers like the lotus raised their heads when the sun rose except the lily, which blooms only with the moon, just as all the subjects are happy when a good king rules except the thieves.

With a bumper harvest, villages and towns hummed with festivities more joyous than usual because of the presence of Rama and Krishna.

CHAPTER 17

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Sk 10. Ch 21 - Slokam 1

Music of the Flute

As the sun rose, a gentle breeze laden with fragrance of opening lotus flowers began to blow and the cowherds and cattle with Krishna and Rama entered the forest playing on their flutes. The thrilling notes reached far in the crisp morning air. The village girls, the gopis could not rest. They saw Krishna dressed like a dancer with peacock feathers stuck in his crown and necklaces of pearls and priceless gems around his neck. His coral lips blowing while the nimble fingers glided over the flute, heavenly music filled hill and dale with thrilling notes. All nature stood still. Cows stared with open eyes and upright ears forgot to chew, the gopis swooned almost and nature throbbed. Said one gopi,

These eyes have nothing better to see

Than the faces of Rama and Krishna

Casting gracious glances and twirling

The lotus flowers by their stems.

O! Gopis, what great merit we must have earned

That we bask in the melody of the flute

Even trees drip with tears of joy

This Brindavan is surely blessed O! sisters

To be trod upon by Krishna's feet

Even the rocky cliffs, exude colourful tears

And the peacocks drunk with delight
Dance, with all their might non stop
Their glorious feathers full spread.
Blessed are the does! With half chewed grass
They look at Krishna with love lit eyes
The celestial damsels from their aerial cars
Shower flowers plucked from Indra's heaven
And these birds that flit from branch to branch
Are surely the sages of yore singing the Lord's exploits
And see how waves of Yamuna
With graceful hands gather the flowers
And places them at Krishna's feet.
This Govardhan mountain is most blessed
As it bears the imprint of Krishna's feet
And echoes and re-echoes with the music of the flute.

Karthiyayani Penance

It was late autumn, the wind was blowing cold. The gopi maidens would get up much before sunrise and clasping one another and singing about Krishna they would go to the river Yamuna and bathe. Then, making images of Devi-Karthiyayani they would pray

Karthiyayani Maha Maye Maha Yogini! Dispenser of all boons

Grant us as our Lord, Krishna

Son of Nanda Gopa

Salutations to Thee Great Goddess!

Deign to accept these flowers and sweets.

And they would return before sunrise to their homes shivering with cold all the time. They worshipped like this for a full month and on the concluding day laid their dress on the bank as usual and entered the river. Krishna, Lord of all yogis, was aware of this and decided to test their devotion for the benefit of the world. With his jovial companions he took away all their clothes and climbing up a neem tree took a seat among its branches. The maidens finished their bath and came to the bank to take up their clothes . But to their consternation the clothes were missing looking up they saw Krishna and companions high up among the branches with the clothes piled up near them. Krishna said.

“Come here O! maidens and receive your clothes!

I am not joking! I have never told an untruth Before and I am not telling one now.

Hearing this, the maidens already immersed neck deep in water and shivering with cold replied

Dear Lord! most charming prince, we are your servants

You know Dharma and we shiver with cold

Pray give us our clothes

“If you are my servants” said the Lord

“Come here and take your clothes”

At this the girls giggled and hiding their body

As best they could, came out slowly

And the lord placed their clothes on their shoulders

And said “By entering this holy river without clothes

You displeased the gods. Hence this punishment.”

The gopis put on their dresses but still would not go. They remained rooted as it were, and were stealing bashful glances. Krishna divined their thoughts and said “I am aware of your desires O! maidens. It is proper and approved by me. Love directed to me cannot sprout like parched grain. It will be only like reunion of the sparks back into the flame. Depart now. I will fulfill your desire before long”.

One day Krishna and the cowherd boys went deeper into the forest enjoying the cool shade under the tall trees. “O! Krishna, look at these majestic trees. They give us shelter in rain and shade in summer. We make sweet smelling oils and medicines from their barks and leaves. They give freely timber for our houses and fuel for fire in winter. How gracious they are! They give all these unasked just as good men give their wealth freely to the needy. Glorious indeed is the life of these trees!” Talking like this they reached the banks of Yamuna and quenched their thirst with its sparkling cool water.

Salvation of the Brahmin Women

After quenching their thirst the boys began to feel the pangs of hunger “O! Rama O! Krishna! We are so hungry! It is nearly

noon". The all knowing Krishna knew also about the devotion of the brahmin women and desirous of giving them salvation spoke thus to his hungry companions. " A short distance from here some learned brahmins are conducting an yagna (sacrificial worship) called Angirasam for attaining heaven. There will be great feasting. Go there, announce our presence and that we are hungry and beg for food in our name". The gopas gladly obeyed and hurrying to the yagnasala, with great humility said "O! Venerable Brahmins! Rama and Krishna hungry and tired after grazing the flock have sent us to you asking for food." The brahmins kept quiet as if they did not hear and the disappointed gopas sadly reported their failure. Gently smiling Krishna replied. " No matter, go again. This time to the brahmin women and announce our need. The gopas implicitly obeying approached the ladies and said, "O! revered ladies, Krishna and his companions have come here. They are very tired and hungry and resting a little distance away and would be glad to get some food." The brahmin ladies who had heard of Krishna's exploits and that he was God himself got excited and in great haste gathered victuals and delicacies in beautiful plates and rushed out like streams rushing to meet the ocean. Brushing aside all obstructions from brothers and husbands they rushed headlong. They saw Krishna and Balarama strolling on the river bank twirling a lotus, a fascinating smile lighting up their faces and surrounded by the gopas. Dark blue like the rain bearing cloud, attired in golden brocade, and peacock's feathers stuck jauntily in the headgear, one arm thrown on the shoulders of a friend Krishna looked like an actor and smiling said,

Fortunate ladies! What can I do for you

You have done the correct thing

For, I am the self of all

Because of me, your mind
Self, children and husbands are dear.
You are blessed. Now return
To your husbands and help them
To complete the yagna as ordained

The poor ladies were downcast. “Lord, our husbands and brothers may not receive us.” But Krishna assured them. “They will surely welcome you back as they have already forgotten this episode.” Thus assured the housewives returned. But one poor woman who had been forcibly prevented from going attained realization and was found dead.

Thus, Krishna and his friends dined well and were refreshed and returned by evening to Brindavan. The brahmins conducting the yagna (sacrificial worship) were now repentant, “Alas! what fools have we been! Our learning has lead us astray. Even when the Lord came in person, we turned him away in ignorance. May he forgive us this fault. But blessed are we because of our good women, surely Lord will pardon us for their sake!”.

Preparation for the Indra Yagna

Balarama and Krishna observed that the gopas, especially the elders were busy with preparations for a great sacrificial worship. They knew what it was for; still with great humility they asked, “Respected elders! We have been noticing these preparations. Pray, for what is it done and to please which deity!” And the elders replied. “This is our annual tribute to Lord Indra who rules in heaven and controls the clouds. At his command the clouds release life giving rain. The trees bear fruits and grass

grows everywhere. Our cows graze happily and we live because of our cows. All this is due to Indra and so we worship Indra by returning to him as sacrifice a little of the wealth we enjoy.” Krishna listened with great respect. But did not agree. “Our wealth and prosperity is due to our own actions. A man is born in a particular circumstance because of his past karma and passes away according to his actions now. If anything, we should rather worship this Govardhan mountain which sustains us and our cattle. With all respect to you our elders, I suggest that we worship this mountain”.

The elders paused. This Krishna was no ordinary child. He had done super human things; saved them too many times. They decided to offer the sacrifice to Govardhan as he advised.

The gopas and gopis dressed in their best and carrying vessels of milk, ghee and curds began to circumambulate Govardhan. Great was their surprise to see Krishna standing at the top of the Govardhan like a colossus receiving the offerings with outstretched hands.

Lifting of Govardhan

Indra, Lord of heaven saw that the sacrifices meant for him were prevented by a mere cowherd boy. He became furious and ordered the clouds to do their best or rather their worst to teach the gopas a lesson. “I myself mounted on my royal elephant Iravatham will watch the operation.” Thus prodded the clouds from all quarters gathered and mounted a heavy assault on Brindavan. The thunder rolled and burst with a heavy downpour of rain. Continuous lightning lighted up the skies. Houses and haystacks were flying in the sky. Hail stones pelted without mercy. “Protect us O Krishna we seek refuge in you”! And the Lord said. “Do not be afraid.. I know that all this is caused by the

proud Indra who is unfit to be a guardian of the world. Enter this cave, all of you, with the flock”. So saying, Krishna lifted the mountain Govardhan trees and all high above his head as a boy lifts a mushroom. The gopas with all their families and flocks trooped in safe. The heavy down pour continued for seven days and now the wind abated. The clouds had become fleecy and white. Indra had failed and fell down full length on the ground begging for mercy which was of course granted. When all had gone out Krishna gently replaced the mountain in its former place.

Divinity Realized

All doubts were now removed . As a child, only a few days old did he not suck the life out of Poothana the rakshasi as time draws out life out of men. As the cart fell on him did he not with his tiny feet hit it shattering it to pieces. He killed the demons who came in the form of a crane and a python and how he danced on the hood of Kaliya serpent and lo! He lifted this mountain holding it aloft as a boy holds a rose by its stalk and O! Nanda how is it that we are attracted by an irresistible love towards your son and he too feels an indescribable love towards us all. Nanda replied.

“O! Gopas ! have no more doubts about this boy.

I shall tell you what Garga told of yore

He was of three colours in the three yugas

Pure white at first, then red, then yellow

And now he has assumed that blue black tint

In earlier births too he was Vasudeva’s son

And hence is known as Vaasudeva

He has many names, this son of yours
I know them all, though you may not
He will bring renown to all gopas
All ye fortunate ones! Who love this wonder child
Will have no enemies even as they that love Narayana
No need for wonder any more. This child is the same as
Narayana”
May the Lord who saved the gopas so many times
Save us too, his worshippers.

Krishna's Abishek Or Holy Bath

At that moment Surabhi ,Kamadhenu, the heavenly cow appeared and said, “O! Krishna I have been sent by Brahma to worship you., as the Lord of Govardhan, Govinda the supreme lord. ” Surabhi from her udders rained milk on him while Iravatham ,Indra's mount, drenched him with ganges water and devas and gopas danced around hailing him as “Govinda! Govinda!” Then the earth overflowed with plenty. The trees flush with sap put forth new sprouts and flowers and even cruel animals became meek and tame. Indra returned to his abode a chastened and wiser god.

Revelation of Vaikunta

Once, Nanda after fasting on ekadashi and keeping vigil , got up too early next day and went out to bathe in the river. This

was not proper, as it was the time allotted to demons and a demon follower of Varuna (god of the sea) took him to the sea world. The gopas raised a hue and cry. Varuna, realizing his mistake, apologized and treated Nanda with great respect. With many precious gifts and sincere apologies Varuna returned Nanda to Krishna and the gopas. Nanda gave a glowing account of the treasurers of the sea world and of his reception. The gopas were now certain that Krishna was the supreme Lord of all the worlds and Vaikunta as well and felt a desire to see Vaikunta. Nothing is impossible to people who think that Krishna is their own. Krishna was of course aware of this desire and decided to oblige his devotees because of his great kindness.

That region which can only be described as sathyam (truth) gnanam (knowledge) and anandam (pleasure endless beyond reason) can be reached only by sages who have overcome the gunas (sathva, rajas and tamas). The gopas after immersion in the brahma lake reached there and saw their own Krishna being hailed by the Vedas.

Raslila

Krishna now decided to enact the greatest of victories the conquest of cupid for the benefit of mankind. With the help of his attendant, Mahamaya (illusion) he made the forest bloom out of season. It was autumn but the jasmine bloomed at night spreading a seductive fragrance miles around. The silvery orb of the moon hung in the sky flooding the river bank with his cooling rays and a gentle breeze sprang up removing the weariness from all living creatures. And Krishna took out his flute and began to play gently at first but soon it gathered force and the thrilling notes seemed to say, “O! All ye maidens gay, I wait here to play with you. O! make haste, make haste!” The gopikas heard the thrilling note

and they could not stay still. Leaving their sleeping husbands, babies, fathers, mothers they ran out not even caring to dress or adorn themselves properly. One gopi had only one earring dangling carelessly. Another put her bangles on her feet and the anklets on her arms. Guided by the moonlight and the fireflies, they reached the riverbank and saw the beloved form of Krishna dressed like a dancer playing on the flute. He looked at them with a bewitching look but his words were not so kind.

“Why have you left your husbands and elders? A woman should not forsake her husband even if he is a thief or an addict. Go back and attend on them if you want to go to heaven hereafter.” The gopis were abashed but would not leave. “We have attained the highest. Be merciful to your devotees. We want only to be the hand maids of Sri Lakshmy who is always by your side!”. The Lord could say no more and resumed the flute and dance and the gopis too, now encouraged began to dance. But now they became vain “Who is so lucky and happy as ourselves? Surely we are the dearest and closest to him.” Krishna divined their thoughts and to cure them of any vanity vanished all at once.

In their distress the gopis began to search for Krishna following his footprints. “O! Jasmine O! Champak! O! Asoka! You seem to dance and smile! Did Krishna touch you as he passed this way? And you majestic trees! Surely you have seen our Lord!” By the side of Krishna’s footprints they saw the footprints of a lady also. “How lucky was this gopi whom Krishna selected for this special favour!” And then the footprints were not seen. The gopis surmised that the love struck Krishna had lifted her on his shoulders! Before long, that special favourite Radha was seen crying bitterly. She confessed that Krishna had offered to carry her and had knelt down and when she was about to climb, disappeared leaving her standing on one leg in the dense forest!. The simple gopis immediately sympathized with her and took her

into their fold. As they could not think of anything else they began to enact the childhood exploits of Krishna. One became Poothana while another became the baby Krishna. One gopi pretended to dance on the hood of the serpent Kaliya. Still another balanced an imaginary Govardhan on her finger. Thoroughly exhausted, they sat in a ring on the moonlit banks of river Yamuna and began to sing or was it a cry?

The Song of The Gopis

“Your presence has made our village bloom

Because your consort ‘Sri’ has made it her abode

Have we not left our all for you

It is not meet, you leave us thus

When at eve you returned with the herds

Covered with dust; the blue curls waving

round your charming face and divine notes

from your flute, made us wait with baited breath

O! how we longed to kiss your tender feet

and wipe the dust away with tears

And now you have left us high and dry

O! Return soon and give us back our souls

You have enslaved!

Krishna would not prolong the agony any further. Actually he was there only watching the game. He had gone behind a veil

drawn by his ever compliant Maha Maya and now as the dazzling sun comes out from behind a cloud, he came out in full glory with outstretched arms towards them. The gopikas were in thousands, but each one thought the Lord was coming towards her. He had assumed as many forms as there were gopis illustrating thereby that he is within every living creature. They automatically formed a ring one gopi and one Krishna . To the celestials above it seemed a brilliant necklace of radiant pearls alternating with flashing blue diamonds was slowly turning round . . Maharshis Sri Narada and Tumburu now appeared tuning their veena. gandharvas with their drums were keeping time and apsaras with their harps sang and danced . And that doyen of dance, Lord Siva and the inimitable Nandi the drummer and Maha Ganapathi and Sri Muruga on the peacock joined the merry-go-round.. Thus they danced till the early hours of dawn when the Lord bade them good bye and they returned to their homes. The gopas, their husbands never missed them at all, thinking the gopis were with them all the time.

We must pause and reflect on this. The Lord's rasaleela defeated the power of the god of love. The god of love now accepted defeat. With all his attendants, the morning breeze, the buzzing bees and beautiful women he had come to conquer and he was conquered. He even wished that he was born as a woman, as a gopi, so he could dance with Krishna. And in atonement promised that anyone who reads this story without carping and with devotion will be free from this malady of carnal love.

Sudarsana's Salvation

Once, the gopas with their leaders Nanda and Upananda repaired to Ambikavanam a place of pilgrimage on the banks of the river Saraswathi. After bathing in the holy river they offered puja and worship to Lord Pashupathi at the temple. They gave

many presents and cows to brahmins after feasting them and spent the rest of the day in fasting and meditation. At dead of night, when all were sleeping, a huge python caught hold of Nanda and began to swallow him gradually. Nanda cried out, “O! Krishna, Krishna save me!” The gopas attacked the serpent with flaming torches without avail and then Krishna appeared and touched the serpent with his foot. At once the serpent let go his hold and a shining vidyadhara stood bowing in the air. The vidyadhara said, “Lord! I am the chief of vidyadharas Sudarsana by name. Proud of my beauty and gifts, I once mocked the holy rishis for their crooked forms. In anger they cursed me to take this fearful serpent’s form but the kind rishis added that at the expiration of my sin, Lord Krishna would touch me with his feet and I would regain my form.” The vidyadhara then bowed and returned to his world while the gopas wondered at this one more instance of Krishna’s power.

Sankhuchuda’s Salvation

Sankhuchuda a retainer of Kubera was unusually proud. One day Balarama and Krishna were disporting themselves on the moon lit banks of Yamuna with the gopis when Sankhuchuda unable to control his jealousy forcibly seized a good many gopis and rushed towards the forest with the shrieking women. Requesting Balarama to look after the remaining gopis, Krishna went out in hot pursuit. As Krishna gained upon the ruffian, he lost heart and leaving the women fled for his life. However Krishna caught up with him and with his discus cut off his head and removed the precious jewel. Krishna gave the jewel to Balarama who wore it as a pendant ever after.

Yugala Geethem

During day time when Krishna went to the forest to graze the cows, the gopis unable to bear the separation assembled in groups and began to sing about him two slokas each

O! Gopis when Krishna played on the flute

The cows and bulls with half chewed grass forget to eat

And listen with upright ears and glazed eyes

Like painted creatures on a canvas

The rivers slow down their speed

And eager to touch his feet

With wave like hands

Bearing sweet smelling garlands

Plants and tendrils wave their hands

And trees heavy laden with fruits

Bend their heads in adoration

As Krishna's musical notes sweep over

And the bees hum in unison

The water fowls and cranes

Meditate in silent meditation

As the waves of flute pass over enveloping

The clouds kept time with a gentle roar

And let down drops like flowers
dropping from the sky,
As Krishna played on his flute
O! Yasoda! who taught your son
All these ups and downs and
divine combinations of notes
Surely he learnt all this himself
Thus did the gopis sing all day
Till evening when they spied
O! delight of the eyes! Krishna
Coming a - dancing with friends
Playing the flute all the time

Suffice it to say, the Gopis did not spend a moment without thinking of Krishna and what is more, they could not.

The Death of Arishtasura the Ox Demon

One day, Arishtasura the ox demon and a friend of Kamsa, approached Gokulam. He had assumed a frightening size, his hump and horns almost touching the clouds. He bellowed and roared sending shivers . With tale erect and lowered horns, he rushed at the cowherds. The terrified cows fled in all directions. The cowherds as usual implored, “Save us O Krishna! Krishna!” and Krishna came to the rescue. He said, “ Stop! You wicked rakshasa. Come against me if you dare,” The rakshasa of course dared and

charged at Krishna. Catching hold of his horns Krishna forced him back on his haunches and lifting him whirled him round and round and threw him. The giant bull fell a hundred yards away vomiting blood, and died .

The celestials showered flowers from above. The gopas thanked their deliverer and retired for the night singing about this latest exploit of the Lord.

Bhagavan Sri Narada Maharshi who could foresee events clearly saw the approaching crisis and to hasten the deliverance of the long suffering people came to Kamsa and addressed him thus, “O! King of the Bhojas! Your great enemy Krishna has arrived at Brindavan posing as Nanda’s son. Balarama his elder brother is also Devaki’s son. The transfer operation was done by Maha Maya your arch enemy.” On hearing this Kamsa shivered with anger and fear. At once he summoned his great wrestlers, Kesi, Mushtika and Chanura, “ O! My wrestlers all! It is time now to prove your worth. Arrange a great wrestling match and worship of the Shiva Dhanush. Let invitations be sent and festivities be arranged”. And now Kamsa began his master plan. He summoned Akrura a great devotee and follower of the yadus and addressed him thus “My dear Akrura I know well about your great loyalty to me. We are conducting a great Dhanur yaga and I request you to invite the gopas and their chief Nanda to grace the occasion with their presence along with their sons Balarama and Krishna. Do this favour and I will be indebted to you ever after.” Akrura was no fool. He suspected a ruse but knowing that Krishna was god himself he undertook the mission . The royal chariot beautifully bedecked and drawn by milk white horses was got ready.

Kesi's Death

Kesi was another demoniac follower of Kamsa. He assumed the form of a demon horse of great size and pawing the ground with his iron hoofs and loudly neighing all the time he descended on the village and directly charged at Krishna. Krishna caught him by his raised forelegs, swung him round. The demon fell a hundred yards away but immediately sprang up and baring his teeth with open mouth rushed again at Krishna. With bare hands Krishna caught hold of it by the ears and thrust his hand up to the elbow into its mouth. The demon horse felt that a red hot rod of iron was being thrust down its throat. The iron teeth were knocked out like ninepins . And in his death agony, dropping dung and urine, expired rolling his eyes. The celestials from above showered flowers and the gopas celebrated the event with dance and song.

Vyomasura The Magician

The merry cowherd boys were playing hide and seek near the forest. Some pretended to be calves while others pretended to be thieves trying to lift them. Vyomasura who was an adept magician pretended that he was also a cattle lifter and began to hide the calves in real earnest. Krishna observed this and pounced on the demon like a lion and throttled him with ease.

CHAPTER 18

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Sk10. Ch 38 - Slokam 1

Akrura's Vision

Akrura was immensely happy. He had heard of the advent of Krishnas's Avatar." It is my good fortune that I am selected for this errand. I shall behold the glorious form of Sri Krishna. The Lord will not suspect me. Is He not the all knowing Lord who resides in the heart of all and therefore knows their innermost secrets ! He will look at me kindly and raise me gently when I fall down at his feet. Krishna knows all."

It was evening when his chariot approached the village. The cows were returning. On the ground Akrura saw the brother's footprints ,bearing the divine marks like the conch, the lotus. A little further he saw them. One was blue like a sapphire mountain and the other dazzling white like a peak of snow Akrura jumped from the chariot and prostrated before them. Krishna gently lifted him and led him inside. They washed his feet, offered light refreshments, and began to fan him.

Krishna gently said "O Akrura we know you are our friend but our poor clansmen at Mathura, how do they fare?" Akrura replied" O Lord ! What shall I say ? They live in fear. What mercy can we expect from a king who killed his own nephews" Thus they talked far into the night . Akrura announced the purpose of his visit. And Krishna promised to accompany him and redress the wrongs.

Akrura rose early and got ready the chariot. Nanda had announced earlier that all able bodied men should get ready to go to Mathura with the annual tribute of ghee and curds. Now they

were also ready with their bullock carts.

The gopis seeing all this felt sad “O sisters, Krishna is leaving. He may not return. How can we forgo the sight of Krishna’s radiant face and smile which can remove the sufferings of the world! The chariot is leaving with Krishna and Rama Our elders are keeping quiet. Will we see them again !” And unable to control their feelings they sobbed aloud. Krishna observed this and said “Dear gopis, You will be always dearest to me. I shall come again” The gopis continued to look at the fast receding chariot till they were seen no more and returned with a heavy heart.

Akrura then guided the chariot towards Mathura along the road parallel to river Yamuna. After driving for some time he parked it in a shady grove. They drank the water from Yamuna. Krishna and Balarama were seated on the chariot. and Akrura went to the river for a ceremonial bath. He repeated the gayathri manthra, meditated on God and immersed himself in the river.

Akrura had a splendid vision. He saw the great coiled serpent Adishesha with a thousand hoods sparkling with jewels and Vishnu taking rest under the hood. Wearing golden silk garments and a jewelled crown he was beyond description . A high forehead fringed with curls, an aquiline nose and lotus eyes that beamed compassion, ever smiling lips, a broad chest on which sparkled the precious kausthubham, and the long powerful hands supple like an elephant’s trunk bore divine weapons like the conch, discus, club, as well as the graceful lotus. Around him were Brahma, Siva, the Seven Sages, the deities representing the Sidhis, Sri Devi and Mahamaya. Maharshis Sri Narada and Thumburu were there playing on the veena. Vishnu and Adishesha looked very much like Krishna and Balarama. Akrura was stunned. Was it an illusion? How could Krishna and Balarama come under water.

He rose from the water and looked at the bank. No ! They were there He immersed once more. Again he saw them as Vishnu and Adishesha. It was now clear. These two youths were actually MahaVishnu, Lord of the universe and Adishesha his companion!. He began to praise the Lord.

Akrura's Hymn

I bow to Thee, the first cause
From whom Brahma was born
Who created this motley world
It's seas, the sky, the shining orbs
and stars, the air and the earth
that swarms with living creatures big and small
Moved by senses which have their origin in Prakriti
Which again was created by you
Even Brahma does not know you in full
But sages know you by insight
And worship you, the embodiment of all wisdom
As rivers of diverse origin merge in the ocean
Different faiths must merge in you
Fire is thy face, Earth thy feet, Sky thy body
The quarters thy ears . The trees and plants
are also yourself O! Krishna and Balarama
Salutations to you again and again
You live in all and all find refuge in you
I have found you! O! Save me! Save me!
Krishna withdrew unto himself all these visions
As an actor withdraws from the stage

And asked “Akrura! You look dazed
“Did you see any wonder ! “ And Akrura said
“Lord! What greater wonder than this
That You exist in every thing around
And they exist in you and you alone
So saying Akrura slowly drove the chariot towards Mathura.

Krishna In Mathura

As they slowly entered the outskirts they observed the people standing in groups talking in excitement. They had heard about the great exploits of the brothers and now feasted their eyes looking at their glorious forms. Akrura requested them to visit and sanctify his house but Krishna said “ Not yet Akrura! I must first free the city from the tyrant and shall enjoy your hospitality later. Meanwhile allow us to get acquainted with the sights of the city by ourselves”. Akrura reluctantly withdrew and informed Kamsa also about their arrival.

Next morning the brothers rose early; finished their morning ablutions and set out with their friends to see the city. It was a great city .. The streets were broad, well paved and straight, fringed by stately mansions on either side. Avenue trees lent shade and brightness at the same time with their flame coloured blossoms. Though a tyrant, Kamsa was also a great builder. There was no ramshackle building anywhere. The citizens seemed to have an inkling of the Lord’s arrival, for the front courtyards were decorated with flowers and garlands and shining brass-vessels heaped with golden corn. Incense was burning and though it was morning rows of lighted lamps were burning in honour of the visitors. Along the wide road sprinkled with scented water there were blooming gardens in beautiful patterns. The roads curved

past then in graceful curves.

The brothers themselves were seen coming, almost dancing it seemed, bringing delight and hope to all lucky enough to be looking at them. The ladies crowded the terraces and windows to shower flowers on these two gods. "O! sisters! What great merit those gopis have acquired, who had Krishna to play with, all these years!" They stood unable to take their eyes away from these young gods.

Further Adventures

A washer man was approaching with his attendants carrying bundles of dyed garments. Krishna called out "Ho! ! Dear man! Give us some of these clothes. You will be greatly rewarded!" But the fellow rudely retorted "These are meant for our king Kamsa. How dare you. Run, Run away if you want to save your lives". At these insolent words Krishna just extended his arm and knocked his head. The terrified followers threw down their bundles and vanished. The gopas untied the bundles and found them full of beautifully dyed costly garments. The brothers now dressed themselves with appropriate garments, Krishna selecting gold coloured clothes and Balarama blue and distributed the rest among the gopas. Thus dressed as if for a drama the group moved on. Now there came along a garland maker Sudama by name. He was thrilled at the sight of Bhagavan Krishna and placed his big basket before them. Krishna chose a vajrayanthimala while Balarama selected a garland of blue lotuses and in return he was given a divine form, good health and life long prosperity. The cowherd boys also adorned themselves with flowers and garlands. The party moved on and the delighted bystanders shouted, "Jai Krishna, Jai Balarama".

The Episode Of The Crooked Sundari

They marched forward like conquerors entering a town and observed a young woman crooked and bent but still beautiful and coming towards them carrying a big silver vessel containing sweet smelling unguents. Krishna looked at her and knew that her body alone was crooked and that her mind was simple and straight. Looking at her eager upturned face Krishna said, “O! Sundari! What are you carrying in that vessel”?

The young woman looking up said, “O! Sundara (Handsome one) I am Kamsa’s hand maid carrying these scents to him”. “And will you give us some?” asked Krishna and the woman replied, “ Give? Why if not to you, to whom else will I give”? Pleased with her simplicity Krishna stepped forward. With his toe he stepped on her foot and with his two fingers under her chin gave her a lift. She stood up straight a very beautiful young woman !. Krishna smiled and turned to leave but she held him by his dress and pleaded, “Lord! do not leave me !” Casting a smiling look at Balarama , Krishna said, “My dear lady, I have very important work to do. After accomplishing it I shall come to your house”. The lady left content and the brothers and friends resumed their march.

Dhanur Yagna

They found people going in one direction only and on enquiry, were told that a great yagna called Dhanur Yagna or worship of the great bow of Lord Shiva was being conducted. Accordingly the gopas too wended their way thither . The bow was kept for public worship in a decorated hall and elderly Brahmins were intoning the great Rudra Japam. The brothers with their followers also entered the hall and with great reverence circumambulated

the huge iron bow touching it with their forehead and prayed with folded hands. Krishna raised the mighty bow and strung it and pulled the string. The bow snapped in two with a terrific noise that reached the quarters. Kamsa heard it too and trembled. The guardians of the bow rushed upon the brothers with uplifted weapons but were easily beaten back.. Other soldiers rushed in but they too were brushed aside. The ground was soon littered with the wounded. Kamsa heard the news. The tyrant knew that his hour had come.

With the approach of evening Krishna and companions withdrew and after a wholesome meal of rice boiled in milk retired to rest .Thinking over the exciting events of the day they fell asleep. They rose with the sun, had their morning ablutions; prayed to the rising sun and resumed the march.

With Kamsa it was a different story. He could not sleep well. He was troubled by bad dreams. He saw his headless trunk in his reflection in the mirror. Smeared with oil and stark naked he was riding on a donkey. Skeletons danced around him. Springing from his bed he snatched his sword and fenced with an imaginary enemy. Owls hooted ominously all night and in the morning jackals howled. Beads of perspiration ran down his cheeks. But he was a kshatriya and a warrior. Orders were forthwith issued that the celebrations should begin. Citizens were welcomed and seated in the galleries around the arena. The royal Nagara -a drum- sounded. Children whistled. Formidable wrestlers entered slapping their thighs, Krishna, Balarama and the gopas were nearing the entrance. A particularly huge elephant was blocking their way. "Ho! Mahout!" They shouted, "Keep your elephant out of the way!" In reply the mahout urged the huge tusk forward. It was already in ruts and when goaded by the mahout it rushed madly at Krishna who promptly stepped aside.

The tusker immediately turned round and got Krishna with his trunks. But Krishna easily slipped down and placed himself under its belly. It sensed Krishna and turned round ; Krishna. caught hold of the tail and drew it twenty yards as a playful child sometimes drags a calf for fun. Seeing Krishna in front of it for a second the tusker rushed and tried to ram him down between its tusks. Krishna again was too nimble and moved out just in time. The elephant pierced the ground with its tusks and could not pull out for some time. Krishna gave a mighty blow on it's forehead. The elephant reeled and fell dead. Placing one foot on its forehead, Krishna pulled out the tusks dripping blood. Krishna shouldered one tusk, giving the other to Balarama and thus armed the brothers entered the arena. They evoked different feelings in the onlookers.

To the wrestlers they looked like lightning incarnate

The ladies saw them as kings among men and as

the very personification of the god of love.

His own clansmen saw them as two of themselves

And tyrants saw them as avengers come to chastise

Kamsa could see only death approaching

While the realized yogis saw the embodiment of truth.

They advanced to the immense delight of the citizens. The people talked to one another about the fabulous exploits of these divine youths; how they were reputed to be avatars of the great Lord and Adisesha come to deliver the earth.

Chanura and Mushtika were already going through the mock fight. Said Chanura, "We have heard that you are good wrestlers.

Let us give an exhibition before the king. He will give us presents". Krishna replied, "We are but youngsters not even grown to full form, we would rather play with youngsters of our own age". Chanura retorted, "O! No! Have you not killed the great elephant (Kualayapeedam) which had the strength of a thousand elephants?" And the fight started; Chanura with Krishna and Mushtika with Balarama. They circled round and round and clashed like eagles hitting the divine youths with their iron fists. The women fainted and even the elders murmured, "This is an unfair match, where huge wrestlers are pitted against fragile youths. When injustice is done elders should either protest or stop it or at least leave the place". So saying they began to leave but by now things began to change. The youngsters were rallying. The giants were rolling on the ground with Krishna and Balarama on top fisting them ferociously. They began to vomit blood and rolled up their eyes quite dead. The brothers of the dead wrestlers Sala and Tosala rushed into the fray and Balarama killed them easily.

There was uproar in the stands. The people, long suppressed, now shouted without restraint. Kamsa from his throne began to issue vain orders, "Bind them! Kill them! Kill Vasudeva and Ugrasena my father!" Grasping his sword he was about to spring but Krishna was upon him and threw him down. As he lay on the ground Krishna with the whole weight of the world in him stood on his chest. Kamsa was dying! Now he saw Krishna in his real form as Sri Hari with his garlands, crowned and bejewelled with four hands carrying the usual insignia and a smiling face that promised salvation even to sinners. And the onlookers saw a wonderful spectacle. A glorious lustre emerged from Kamsa and slowly merged into Krishna. Kamsa had attained salvation.

Krishna hastened to the prison and fell down at the feet of his parents Vasudeva and Devaki, "O Father, Mother, we were deprived of your caresses and kind words in our infancy by a

cruel fate, and we too were unable to serve you. Pray excuse us". Vasudeva and Devaki were speechless, choked by tears and just embraced their sons. Krishna continued, "Our grandfather Ugrasena will be king and with our support even the guardians of the earth will come and make obeisance before him." There was great rejoicing and week long celebrations. The gopas had a gala day and they were the honoured guests. They were now preparing to return. Krishna and Balarama sadly said, "Dear father and friends you have caressed and taken care of us in our helpless childhood. How can we ever repay you for all this kindness. When we have finished our education and put things in order we shall again come to touch your feet and mothers' and the elders'." With moist eyes they touched the feet of the elders and the gopas returned with a heavy heart.

The Brothers At Sandipani Ashram

Vasudeva, now invited brahmins for the proper initiation of his sons into brahmacharya and then sent them to a gurukula ashram conducted by Santipani maharshi at Avanti. The two brothers were exemplary students and easily mastered all the shastras and martial arts. At the conclusion, they respectfully approached the Acharya to give gurudakshina. The guru's wife who had felt the divinity of the disciples said, "Dear husband! these disciples of your's are divine beings. Kindly ask them to bring back our son who was lost in the sea at Prabasa some years ago". Accordingly Santipani maharshi requested them to bring his son back as gurudakshina. The two brothers at once drove in their chariot to Prabasa. The god of the seas immediately appeared with costly gifts and pleaded, "Lord! The boy was not taken by me but by the rakshasa Panchajana who in the shape of a conch is residing at the bottom of the sea. At once the two brothers dived into the sea and killed

the demon but the boy was not there. Next they went to Samyamani the land of the dead where Yama ruled and blew the conch. Yama the great dispenser of justice appeared with presents and asked with great respect, “Lord! What can I do for you?” Krishna said. “You have brought our guru Sandipani maharshi’s son here some years back. Bring him back now”. The boy grown older now was brought back. Krishna and Balarama taking the boy in their chariot returned to earth and presented the boy to the delighted parents. Words cannot describe the joy of the old guru. Standing up with both hands raised he blessed his disciples, “May your desires be fulfilled and may you never forget what you have learned and be able to remember them when most required and may you become proficient in whatever is left unlearned either”.

Udhava And The Gopis

Udhava, prominent among the vrishnis was about Krishna’s age and size and a great friend. He had his education under the devaguru Brihaspathy himself and everyone thought he was wise beyond his years and probably thought so himself. He found Krishna somewhat sad and to cheer him up he said, “O Krishna, you are so wise and great and we know you are an incarnation of Sri Hari himself. Why are you sad?” Krishna replied, “O Udhava, when I remember my devoted gopis who abandoning their homes elders and even children came rushing to me and danced the whole night even unmindful of social norms my heart melts. Go to them dear Udhava, with my message that I have never left them and shall come to them before long”. Udhava was intrigued and wanted to see these gopis and agreed to go.

Accordingly the next day he drove in a well appointed chariot, reaching the village late in the evening. Everyone was busy. The cows were being milked. The sound of milking the

shouting of the cowherds calling the cows by their names, running after the calves, driving away the bellowing bulls - all these sounds filled the air. Inside the houses, bells were ringing and the perfume of burning incense filled the air. It was the time for worship. Hymns in praise of god were being sung loudly . Udhava got down before Nandagopa's house. Nandagopa warmly welcomed him and embracing lead him in. He was seated comfortably. Nandagopa then enquired.

“O! Dear one! Is our friend Vasudeva's son well?

He is now in the midst of friends and relatives

By great good fortune Kamsa is dead

His own sins killed him. He hated the good yadus

And drove them out

Does Krishna remember us,

His mother and his friends?

The gopas and this Vraja itself

The gentle cows or Brindavan itself

With its ponds and verdant hills?

Will Krishna come again?

O! When can we see his high forehead

And gracious eyes and graceful nose

Those mirror like cheeks and smiling mouth

He saved us from forest fire and heavy floods

From the fierce serpent and death in other forms

And when we remember his wondrous deeds

His words, laughter, jokes and side long looks
O! Udhava, this poor heart breaks!
And when we see these meadows
And lawns sanctified by his feet
The mind flies back to that time
I think, Krishna and Rama are verily gods
Come here to fulfill the wishes of the devas
And Nanda could speak no more, choked by feelings
And Yasoda could only weep, tears coming in floods
Such intense devotion Udhava had never seen and said
“You are the most blessed among mortals
As you are so attached to Krishna, the soul of all
These two sons of yours are the seeds of the universe
Thinking of them even at the time of death
One attains the eternal splendour.
You both have fixed your mind on them
What else remains for you to reach

Ere long, they will come here again
As he promised at the ring after Kamsa’s death
Do not be cast down, O! you fortunate ones
You will shortly see Krishna again,
He is already in you as fire is inside the fuel

He loves not anyone in particular or hate either
He does not consider anyone high or low
Or as equal and unequal; has neither
mother, father, nor wife nor sons,
He creates the gunas and with them
Makes this world of strange mixtures and opposites
And entering them, plays many parts.
Thus they spent the whole night talking
Till early dawn, when the gopis rose
And lighted the lamps and began churning
The big pans of curds, singing hymns
About Krishna all the while and his wondrous deeds

The scent and sound of curds spread far and wide
Dispelling all inauspicious things
And when it was light, they came out
And saw the chariot, golden domed
Parked in front of Nanda's house!

The gopis saw the chariot. It looked familiar.” Has Akrura come again? He took our beloved Krishna to Mathura. Has he come to take us also there to be offered as sacrifice to Kamsa's ancestors”. The gopis wondered but looking closer they saw Udhava who looked like Krishna and was attired similarly. So, getting bolder they came near; found that he was Krishna's

messenger, surrounded him and pestered him with questions “Friend! when will our Krishna come? Does he still remember us? Perhaps he has sent you to comfort his parents? He does not care for us any more. Bees abandon flowers after sucking the honey. Courtesans abandon their lovers after sucking their money. Perhaps Krishna too has left us!” And the poor gopis began to shed tears while others found solace, singing about his exploits. A blue black bee came buzzing and settled before them. Apostrophizing it as if it was a messenger from Krishna, they began to sing.

Do not touch us O! bee!

Cousin of the faithless Krishna

Your whiskers are the colour of kumkum

Worn on their breasts by those women of the town

How does Sri tolerate them

Those ladies of the town?

Perhaps, Sri too is cajoled like us

By the sweet, looks and words of the Lord

Which, Alas! None can resist.

Now go! You six footed ones

And sing your notes to them

Leaving homes and hearths

our children and husbands

we wander like birds that leave their nests

giving up hopes here and even hereafter .

Hiding, like a hunter he killed Vali
And disfigured cruelly a lady
Who! poor thing loved him dearly
And bound the hands and feet of Bali
Who was kneeling at his feet
The gopis now relented and cooling down they said,
“Is the noble Krishna still at Mathura?
Does he still remember his father’s house?
Or his relations who worshipped him
Does he ever recall our stories, his hand maids
Will he again place his strong hands on our heads?
Hands that smell like sandalwood
Hearing all this Udhava said, “O ladies! You have attained
the impossible
You will be adored by the world
You have given up all for Vasudeva
Sages try to attain the same
By sacrifice , austerity, penance or knowledge
What is unattainable to them, you have attained
By your unparalleled devotion
You have attained the supreme known as Krishna
Your temporary separation has proved to be

A great blessing for me. Now hear
The message he has sent through me.

My friends! I am never far from you,
I create the world and permeate it
As fire permeates wood.
This soul is distinct from body and mind
Not subject to waking, dream or sleep

As the awakened man views the events of dream
So too, the awakened soul views the events of life
As the rivers have the ocean as their goal
Self conquest is the goal of the Vedas

My staying away from you is to keep your mind tied on me
A woman fixes her mind on an absent lover
More steadily than on one who is near
By fixing your mind on me absent,
You finally reach me without fail
Pleased with this conversation, the gopis continued.
Does Krishna please the ladies of the town
By his sweet looks and even sweeter words?
Does he still remember us and those memorable nights in
Brindavan

When to the tune of jingling anklets, he danced with us?
Will he again, revive our drooping spirits
As Indra revives the parched fields with rain?..
Alas! Why would he come here
What business has he with rustics like us !
Pingala, the courtesan spoke the truth,
Despair is sweet. It is ultimate happiness”

We know that, still our hankering desire strengthens
Who can get free when even Sri has failed
Those lovely ponds and forest greens
The sound of flute and his dancing friends
Crowd memory’s lanes making it sick

And how can we forget though try we may
His gallant ways and tender looks
Oh Lord! Lord of Vraja! Our Master!
Raise us from this pond of despair!

Udhava was stunned to see the devotion of these village
girls.
He had come to advise and teach.
But now decided to learn and pray.
Even Sri has not enjoyed the bliss

these gopis had attained during Rasalila.

May I be born as a creeper or blade of grass

At Brindaban whose sands purify the world

Praying thus

Udhava remained for a few months more

And then taking an affectionate leave

And loaded with presents, returned

To Mathura and narrated to Krishna all the events.

CHAPTER 19

ॐ नमो भगवते वासुदेवाय
ॐ नमो भगवते वासुदेवाय

Sk 10. Ch 50 - Slokam 1

Confrontation With Jarasandha

Asthi and Prapthi the two bereaved wives of Kamsa now departed in tears to their father the mighty king of Magadha. The king was furious and swore he would exterminate the yadus.. He collected a mighty army of eighteen akshouhinis consisting of elephants, horses, chariots and infantry and laid siege to Mathura. Krishna and Balarama came out with a small army. A divine chariot now appeared with charioteer and divine weapons . Said Krishna “Dear brother, you please go and destroy the army and I shall tackle Jarasandha”. A fierce battle ensued. Arrows flew, horses screamed and elephants charged. Jarasandha was bound hands and feet by the powerful Balarama but Krishna let him free saying, “Let him go brother. He will soon collect another army and return. This will serve our purpose of ridding the earth of asuric forces”. And he was let free. But smarting under defeat and prodded by Maharshi Sri Narada, he returned with a bigger army which too was destroyed with ease. This went on seventeen times. Now, he came on for the eighteenth time in alliance with Kalayavana and his countless hordes of wild yavanas from the north. The citizens of Mathura were now really panic stricken. The two divine brothers now took counsel . Krishna said “Dear brother! You please hold the enemy in check. I shall safely take all our people to an island fortress named Dwaraka by my yogic powers” And turning to the people Krishna said “My dear people! Close your eyes tight and open them only when I tell you. Now close”.

Dwaraka

A few minutes later Krishna's voice rang out "Now open"! Krishna had ordered Visvakarma to build a model city by the sea. And the citizens of Mathura now found themselves in the broad streets of a splendid city. It was ideally laid out with broad streets and storied mansions and squares with fountains and gardens where bloomed the parijata from Indra's garden and the kalpaka tree that granted your every wish. Every citizen had a mansion of his own according to his rank and status. There were quite a few temples with great gates and high domes and grand prakarams and mandapams from where learned pundits intoned Vedic scriptures. Schools were housed in imposing structures with adjoining libraries. In short, Visvakarma had shown all his skill to please his master Krishna. There was never a strike or a jatha in the good days of old. Finding the people well housed and fed Krishna emerged from the gate, completely unarmed and wearing a lotus garland and appeared before Kalayavana who was besieging Mathura.

Though a savage, this yavana was a sport "You are unarmed Krishna, so I too will fight you unarmed". So saying he pursued Krishna who apparently fled before him. The yavana began to mock "O! Krishna! You are a scion of the gallant Yadus. You should not run from an enemy". Krishna would slacken and the yavana could almost touch him when suddenly he would dart forward and appear atop a neighbouring hill. Thus Krishna led him a dance and then suddenly entered a cave. An ancient man with a long beard and an effulgent appearance was stretched in deep slumber and Krishna hid beside him. The yavana too coming in hot pursuit, entered and observed the sleeper "O! Ho! So you have entered the cave and now pretend to sleep". So saying he kicked the sleeper who slowly opened his eyes. His gaze fell upon the intruder and his eyes blazed. There was a flash and the yavana went up in flames.

Muchukunda Moksham

Here, Parikshit, interposed “O! Sage! Who was that ascetic? How came he there?” Then, Sri Suka continued “He was the emperor Muchukunda, son of the great king Mandhata of the Ikshvaku family. Like his father, he was also a valiant soldier whose help was sought by the devas in their fight against the danavas (asuras). He had to stay with Indra, Lord of heaven for a long time. When the devas got Lord Subramania as their commander, they allowed Muchukunda to return to his kingdom, loading him with precious presents and granting any boon he might desire. But by that time all his relatives were dead, aeons had passed and so Muchukunda said “I have no desire except the desire to sleep”. And Indra Lord of the devas said “Let it be so! Sleep soundly and whosoever disturbs and wakes you up shall be burnt to death!” And Muchukunda was sleeping soundly until the unlucky yavana rudely kicked him and was burnt to ashes!.

Muchukunda now looked more closely at his radiant visitor. Seeing his glorious face and four arms with the discus, conch, lotus and mace he wondered “Are you Indra, or Varuna or any other guardian of the world? What is your name Lord?” and Krishna replied

I have countless names and births

Even sages who know me cannot say how many

I have been born now as Vaasudeva

Son of Vasudeva the yadava chief

I have killed Kamsa and his asuric aides

Have now come to bless you and grant your wishes

As you have prayed for these in previous births

No one who comes to me goes with empty hands
Muchukunda replied
Lord! People ere this have been fooled by dire desires
Craving happiness rooted in sorrows
Man is ensnared with woman and vice versa
Having achieved somehow this human birth
Blindfold falls in the well of darkness
Of sensual pleasures, like a beast
Lord! My own life has been a waste
Squandered in arrogance of wealth and power
Kingdom, son, wife and untold wealth
Sunk in delusion of empire pomp and power
Man is suddenly confronted by thee as Death
Like a serpent that waits for a rat
That has ventured into its hole, you strike
If by great good chance, man meets a saint
Who shows the way, he is blessed
Therefore Lord! I renounce all boons
And want only Thee, the essence of all consciousness
And Krishna said “Great Emperor! Your mind is pure,
You are firm as a rock buffeted by waves
Stay here a little more to work out your karma
In your next birth you will be a pious Brahmin
And attain me finally.

Muchukunda having no further desire entered Badrikashramam and built an ashramam for himself near Naranarayana ashram and after severe tapas, entered his next birth.

Krishna too with Balarama destroyed the yavana, armies and faced the Magadhan army. Then instead of facing Jarasandha he pretended to run and entered the forest. Jarasandha surrounded the forest and set it on fire. Krishna was seen leaping on to a rock from where he took another leap and landed in Dwaraka. Jarasandha thought his enemy was burnt to death and returned to his capital greatly rejoicing.

Rukmini's Marriage

The brothers were now of marriageable age and Balarama was married to Revathy, daughter of Revatha. Bhishmaka was the good king of Vidarbha. He had five sons, Rukmi, Rukmamali, Rukma ratha etc and the youngest Rukmini was the avatar of Sri Lakshmy herself. She had heard about Krishna, his charming appearance and exploits from travelling minstrels and had decided to choose him as her husband. Her father and relatives had approved but not so, her brothers especially the eldest Rukmi who hated Krishna and wanted to give his sister to Sisupala, prince of Chedi. Even the day of betrothal was fixed and poor Rukmini was now in a fix. In this extremity she could only cry to God for help and as if in answer to her prayer she saw an old brahmin approaching. She received him with great respect and asked him tearfully if he could carry a letter from her to Krishna. The old man agreed and carrying the letter like a precious treasure started on the long journey to Dwaraka – Crossing much difficult terrain and some broad rivers the old man saw at last the gopurams and domes of Dwaraka. Krishna, who was reclining on a couch saw

the old man approaching and immediately getting down, took him by the arm and led him to his couch and gently said “Good sir, did you have a pleasant journey? Is Dharma followed in the land you come from? Are brahmins content with their lot? And other castes as well? If a brahmin is satisfied with what he gets and if he is a friend of all and humble and selfless, I bow to him. And is the ruler helpful to all? Dear to me is such a ruler. Now, tell me the purpose of your visit!” The old brahmin blessed Krishna and handed him the letter.

Rukmini’s letter

Hearing your noble qualities sung by minstrels
And your great charm, you have entered my heart
And pray! Don’t think me immodest
For which modest maiden, however high born
Can help loving a hero like you, peerless among men
I have chosen you, I am yours and therefore
Allow not the Chedi prince to touch me
The lion allows not a wolf to snatch its food
If I have acquired any merit in previous births
By penance, rites, worship of elders or by giving alms
May my hand be touched only by Krishna and not by any
one else. If you say “ You are within the lady’s quarters
How can I get at you, guarded as you are”

I shall tell you how “When tomorrow I go out

To worship at Bhavani’s temple as our custom is

Guarded by soldiers, come incognito, conquer them

And marry me by the Rakshasa rite as reward to heroes
If O! Lotus eyed Lord! If I do not get your grace
I shall starve myself to death. This is certain The Brahmin said
“These are the contents of my message. Ponder over this and do
whatever you think is fit”.

On hearing this Krishna was greatly pleased and taking
the brahmin by the arm said “I too am devoted to her and I am not
getting any sleep. I shall free her even as the sacrificial fire is
freed from the fuel.” Then ascertaining the date fixed for her
betrothal, he ordered Daruka to get ready the chariot. When the
chariot was ready with four shining horses, Krishna ascended it
with the brahmana by his side. They reached Vidarbha and the
brahmana alighted. Rukmini was getting agitated. She was sunk
in despair and then there were some good auguries. Her left eye,
hand and thigh throbbed and in a few minutes she saw the
brahmana approaching. By his bright appearance she knew that
the mission had been a success and in her extreme joy not seeing
anything valuable enough to give, prostrated herself at his feet.
Blessing her the brahmana said “I have brought Krishna. He is at
the outskirts and will come at the appropriate moment”.

Needless to say, Rukmini was beside herself with joy. The
city had already been bedecked with flags and arches. Sounds of
Vedic hymns and mantras came from the temples. The initial
dedication was over and the holy thread was wound round her
wrist dedicating her to Sisupala . Married young women adorned
her and surrounded by them and escorted by soldiers with drawn
swords the procession started to Devi Bhavani’s temple. The

princess looked beautiful beyond compare just entering maidenhood, slightly smiling and almost dancing, she was moving like a swan and entered the temple “O! Great Bhavani! Grant me a boon! May I have Krishna as my Lord!” She prayed and it seemed the goddess did smile. The princess came out casting timorous glances all round and saw Krishna smiling and beckoning to her from his chariot. At once she hastened towards him and Krishna gave her his hand, seated her by his side and nodded to the charioteer to drive. The bystanders, mainly rival princes, suitors, who had come to try their luck, were too stupefied and stunned to protest. By the time they recovered Krishna and his bride were off.

The armies of Sisupala and Jarasandha now tried to pursue. But Balarama with the yadava army had come just in time and a fierce battle ensued. Balarama with his plough (a weapon) and the yadava leaders Samban and Gada battered the enemies. Krishna’s bow twanged repeatedly and the ground was littered with the dead bodies of the enemies. Jarasandha consoled Sisupala saying that the times were unfavourable and they could wait for better times and take revenge. But Rukmi , Rukmini’s eldest brother, would not be consoled. He continued to fight until he too was disarmed and disfigured .He was tied to the chariot wheels and Krishna was about to cut off his head when Rukmini fell on her knees and pleaded for her brother’s life. It was of course granted especially since Balarama also advised restraint.

Krishna and Rukmini now entered Dwaraka at the head of the victorious army. They were now married according to Vedic rites. The city wore a gala appearance and month long celebrations followed.

The Story Of The Jewel Syamanthaka

Satrajit a prominent yadava was a worshipper of the sun god. The sun god Surya was so pleased with his friend and worshipper that he presented him with a rare jewel, an immense diamond of rare lustre. Satrajit prostrated before the god and wearing it round his neck was returning home. People mistook him for the sun himself and thought the sun god was coming to pay homage to Sri Krishna. Satrajit had a small temple built in his house to house the jewel and performed puja (worship) with the help of learned brahmins. Every day the jewel would produce gold and this became the talk of the town. Krishna sent for him and said it was better to keep such a treasure in the king's treasury where the immense wealth it produced daily, could be used for the peoples' benefit. But Satrajit was greedy. He demurred and Krishna did not force him.

Now Satrajit had a younger brother Prasena by name. One day he went hunting with the jewel round his neck. He got separated from his friends and did not return at all. And it was public secret that Krishna had asked for it and gossips immediately began to talk suspiciously about Krishna. Now this was unbearable and Krishna with his friends entered the forest in search of Prasena. Soon they came upon the ghastly remains of Prasena. He had been killed with his horse and dragged up a hill by a lion. There they found evidence of a fierce fight between the lion and a huge bear. Evidently the bear had won and dragged its booty up a hill and entered its lair.

Leaving the attendants outside, Krishna entered the cave. The cave was lit up with the lustre of the jewel Syamanthaka which a child was playing with. Seeing the stranger the child cried loudly and the huge bear Jambhavan came to her rescue. Then ensued a great fight, between Jambhavan and Krishna. The

fight went on for eighteen days Jambhavan the hero of Ramayana was now facing defeat and then realization dawned on him. His opponent seemed very much like Sri Rama his master. He now realised that it was the same Lord Vishnu in a new avatar. With tears in his eyes he prayed, "Pardon me, Lord now I see you are my master Sri Rama in a new avatar. Forgive my ignorance!" The Lord not only pardoned him but gently stroked him making him whole again. Krishna explained that he had come in search of the jewel to retrieve his reputation. Jambhavan gladly gave him not only the jewel but also his daughter Jambavati and escorted them back to Dwaraka.

Meanwhile at Dwaraka the citizens were plunged in grief. They blamed Satrajit who had brought this misfortune by his greed. Devaki, Rukmini and others went to the temple of Mahamaya praying for Krishna's welfare. And as if in answer to their prayer Krishna entered the gates, victorious and with a new bride Jambavati. Satrajit too, now entirely repentant, came with the jewel Syamanthaka and his daughter Satyabhama and requested Krishna to accept both. Krishna smiled and said "I gladly accept Satyabhama but not your other present, the jewel. Keep it yourself". And the marriages of Satyabhama and Jambavathi with Krishna were celebrated with great pomp and splendour.

The Destruction Of Narakasura

Narakasura the offspring of Mother Earth was proving to be a scourge of gods and men. He waged fierce war against the devas, drove Indra from heaven; despoiled it of its treasures and even snatched Aditi's ear rings and Indra was hiding in the crest of mount Meru. The devas supplicated before Vishnu (now Krishna) for relief from this distress. Krishna seated on Garuda and with Sathyabhama by his side, started for Pragjyotisha the

citadel of Narakasura. It was a heavily fortified place, surrounded by several rings of defense. There was a moat filled with alligators and then a wall of fire. Krishna seated on Garuda flew over the moat, smashed the mountainous barriers with his mace and blew on his famous panchajanya sending tremors throughout .

A mighty demon named Mura with five heads breathing fire, came out rushing wielding a huge trident. He hurled the trident but Krishna's arrows cut it into pieces and another hail of arrows swept off his heads. Naraka himself now advanced seated on a mighty elephant, and flanked by an army of elephants. Garuda, now struck them with his powerful wings and they ran backward squealing and trampling down their own army. Naraka was furious and was about to hurl his spear but before it could leave his hand, his head bright with fiery ear rings was severed by Krishna's sudarshan.

The earth goddess now appeared
and presenting a necklace of priceless pearls
and matching ear rings, gently said
“Lord now forbear! The asura has been killed.
He had been the very avatar of rajas and tamas.
But these too begin from you alone .
It behoves you therefore to pardon.
His son Bhagadatta is a valiant prince.
Let him be made king in his father's place.
And my lord, let your gracious gaze
Fall on these hapless maidens freed by you.

The Lord of course, obliged. Bhagadatha was crowned king and Krishna was gentle and kind to the young women just freed. They were gazing with admiration, love at their saviour. Bhagadatha sent them in palanquins loaded with bridal presents to Dwaraka. Later on Krishna married all the sixteen thousand of them at the same time in as many pandals and as many houses. There was no difference in status among the sixteen thousand and eight women. Each thought that Krishna was with her only all the time.

The Story Of Nriga

Once the young princes of Dwaraka had gone to the nearby forests for a picnic. There they saw an ancient moss covered well and peeped inside out of curiosity. There at the bottom of the dry well they saw a huge lizard. The children tried to pull it out with strings and hooks but without success. They reported the matter to Krishna who came to investigate and at once pulled it out easily. At his touch the creature at once changed into a shining deva dressed in gold bowing before them with folded hands. Krishna knew who it was; still for the benefit of others he asked “O! You, shining deva; tell us your story”. The deva bowed low and said “Lord! I am Nriga son of Ikshwaku, and I ruled over this vast domain and delighted in gifting thousands of well adorned milch cows with calves to as many learned deserving brahmins. This, I was able to do for many days. One day, as an old brahmin was leading the cow and calf to his ashram, another brahmin met him on the way and claimed the cow. The two brahmins disputed long and at last came to me for a decision. “The cow is mine. I was given this cow yesterday”. “No No! it was given to me to day by the king” Both were telling the truth. The fact was that the cow which had been gifted the previous day had strayed back to

join the herd and not knowing this the king had gifted it again. Here was a dilemma. Neither brahmin would oblige though the king offered a thousand cows in exchange and both departed in high dudgeon. At this point the king suddenly died and was taken to Yama, the god of death, for judgment. After consulting the great accountant Chitrugupta, Yama decreed “You have gifted thousands of cows for which you deserve enjoyment in heaven. But you have though unknowingly given a cow that belonged to another, for which you deserve the life of a lizard. You shall have your choice. Which do you prefer first.” The king pondered a little and said “Let me suffer the lizard’s life first and have heavenly life later. It was decreed like that and I am here now” Saying this the deva slowly rose to celestial regions. The yadava youths realized that even by mistake they should not misappropriate a Brahmin’s property.

Diversion Of Yamuna

It was a time of comparative peace at Dwaraka and Balarama felt a longing to visit Nandagopa and Yasoda and Rohini and others and reached Brindavan. The gopas and gopis felt as if their soul had returned and recalled with emotion the happy old times. With eyes slightly reddened he danced with the gopies the whole night on the river bank, bright in the moonlight. Feeling thirsty they wanted some cool water and ordered the river to come near. But the river would not come. Balrama’s eyes became more red with anger and with his mighty plough drew the river towards him. This diversion of the river can be seen even to day. After satisfying the aspirations of the Vraja, Balrama returned to Dwaraka.

Paundraka Moksham

Poundraka Vasudeva king of the Charusha was a very funny impostor. He pretended that he was the real Vasudeva, the real avatar (incarnation) of Vishnu and went to the extent of imitating Krishna in every detail. He painted himself blue, wore golden attire, and had an imitation kaustubham suspended from his neck. He attached two artificial arms to himself and carried imitation conch, discus, mace and of course real lotus. Not content with this he sent messengers to Dwaraka "O! Krishna! I am the real avatar. Surrender your weapons lest I invade Dwaraka." Krishna of course, did not wait to be invaded. He marched with an army of many divisions towards Charusha's capital. The Charusha's were aided by the king of Kasi as well. A great battle followed. The Charushas and the king of Kasi were defeated. Paundraka was killed by the discus. A flight of arrows severed the Kasi Raja's head and deposited it at his city gates. It burned up the city too.

To avenge the death of his father, Kasi Raja's son resorted to black magic. He raised an evil spirit which began to destroy Dwaraka but, Sudarsan chakra again flared up and destroyed the evil spirit. Thus ended the adventure of Paundraka and his ally.

Dwivida The Monkey

Dwivida and Mainda the twin monkeys were heroes of the Ramayana and had fought for Sri Rama, under Hanuman. Now, however in Dwapara yuga Dwivida had fallen into evil company. He had been a friend of Narakasura and wanted to avenge his friend's death. Fate led him to Anarta the land where Balrama was staying and the monkey began to work havoc. He pulled up trees, pounded the hills and prevented the free flow of river where Balrama's wives were sporting and insulted them. Balrama came to their rescue and soon came to blows. Balrama wielding his club and the monkey armed with uprooted trees. Balrama who was none other than Sankarshana killed the monkey soon.

CHAPTER 20

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Sk 10. Ch 69 - Slokam 41

Pradyumna

A son was born to Krishna and Rukmini. The child was the image of Krishna himself and the fond parents named him Pradyumna. He was the avathar of Kamadeva who had been burnt to ashes by Sree Rudra's anger. While the child was still in the cradle it was stolen by Sambaraasura and thrown into the sea because the asura knew that he would meet his death at the hands of Pradyumna when he grew up. Rukmini was inconsolable but even Krishna kept quiet knowing that destiny would have its way.

The child however did not die. It was swallowed by a big fish, which was caught in a net by fishermen who gave it to Sambara's cooks. When the cooks opened it up they were surprised to see a shining baby within and immediately informed their mistress Mayavati who took it under her care and brought it up with great tenderness. This Mayavati was none other than Ratidevi whose husband Kamadeva was burnt to ashes earlier. Needless to say, Mayavati tended the child with special tenderness. Before long, the child grew up, as an exceptionally handsome youth, the cynosure of ladies' eyes. Mayavati's manner changed from that of a foster mother to that of a lover. The young man noticed it and said. "O! Mayavati, your manner to me is changing recently pray why?" Mayavati replied, "Lord! You were Kama in your previous life and I was your wedded wife Rati. Our master Sambarasura is a powerful demon and a great magician. You too must master this art, to overcome him in fight and claim me your lawful wife."

Pradyumna confronted Sambara and roused his anger. The asura madly rushed at him with raised club but Pradyumna deftly parried it, stepping aside. Then ensued a terrific combat the demon trying his utmost with magic devices. He would appear as a python; next moment as a wild tiger and again as a demon in the clouds above raining arrows. All these, Pradyumna easily overcame with the help of the Mahamayamantra, which Mayavati the great enchantress had taught him earlier. As a last desperate attempt the demon took up huge mace and rushed at Pradyumna, but Pradyumna took up a flashing sword and with a mighty stroke cut off the demon's head. The devas watching the fight from above showered flowers and rejoiced.

Mayavati knew the art of flying. The couple flew over hill and dale and rivers and came over Krishna's palace in Dwaraka. Like a light blue cloud and a flash of lightning in it, they hovered overhead and descended gently in Krishna's courtyard in front of Rukmini and her friends. Rukmini who was grieving all these years like a cow bereft of its calf knew by instinct that this was her long lost son. She embraced her son and daughter-in-law while tears of love welled up from her eyes. Presently Krishna also came up from behind and greeted and embraced his son as if nothing particular had happened. He had known this all along, but he did not divulge it to anyone. Balarama came hurrying and so did Sree Narada maharishi who explained everything. The entire city of Dwaraka was plunged in delight with citizens celebrating the event with sweets and crackers.

There were bad tidings from Hastinapura. It was rumored that the Pandavas had died in a fire accident. To find out the truth and offer condolence to the Kurus the brothers set out to Hastinapura.

Krishna knew that it was not true but pretended to sympathize with the treacherous Kurus and returned to Dwaraka. Balarama stayed for some time at Hastinapura and Duryodhana used this opportunity to take lessons in wrestling from Balarama. During the absence of Krishna some evil things had happened at Dwaraka. Satadhanva a former suitor of Stayabhama was burning for revenge. Of all the people Akrura and Kritavarma instigated Satadhanva to commit a crime. They said “ You have been cheated by this Satrajit. Rob him of his jewel, kill him if necessary.” The wicked Satadhanva stole into Satrajit’s house at night: killed him without mercy and decamped with the jewel. When poor Satyawama heard of her father’s murder she beat her breast and wailed piteously. Krishna soon returned and consoled her saying, “ I will avenge your father’s death.”.

He started in pursuit of Satadhanva. Anticipating this, now thoroughly frightened he had fled leaving the jewel in the care of Akrura. After a hot pursuit Krishna caught up with the killer and cut off his head with Sudarshan chakra. Krishna ransacked his baggage but the jewel was not found. He returned to Dwaraka.

Mean while Akrura had fled to Kasi with the jewel and with the help of the immense wealth it produced he started feeding thousands of Brahmins. He came to be known as ‘Danapathy’ king of alms givers. Krishna heard of this extraordinary alms giving and approached Akrura who immediately confessed that the jewel was with him only. Krishna said, “Keep it with you and use it wisely.” So saying Krishna returned to Dwaraka.

He who reads this story with piety and faith will be cleared of all suspicion and ill reputation.

Krishna at Indraprastha

Days passed and Krishna heard that the Pandavas were at Indraprastha. Desirous of seeing them and their mother, aunt Kunthi-who had also arrived – he went to Indraprastha with his friend Satyaki. The Pandavas receiving him felt as if the soul had come to an inert body. Krishna prostrated before Yudhishtira and Bhima, embraced Arjuna while Nakula and Sahadeva prostrated before him. Draupathi received equal respect. When all were comfortably seated Kunthidevi said in a choking voice, with tears in her eyes.

“O! Krishna you are the Lord of all. Even in the midst of all our trials we were strengthened by remembering you. Does Vasudeva my brother remember us now that he has sent you to comfort us? You do not consider anyone as yours or otherwise, still you comfort and brighten our lives in our troubles when we think of you.”

Yudhishtira also echoed the same sentiments and the cousins spent the winter months happily. One day Krishna and Arjuna went out for a ride in the chariot. They were riding along the banks of Yamuna when they espied from a distance a beautiful maiden alone. Krishna said to Arjuna, “O! Arjuna, please go ahead and ascertain who that maiden is”. Arjuna obeyed. Soon he came up to her and politely asked “Pray, gentle maiden, who are you and why are you wandering alone”? The maiden replied, I am Kalindi, my mother is the deity of this river. My father is the sun god. I live in a palace under the river built by my father for me. I am in search of lord Krishna. I have heard much about him and wish to marry him and no one else!” Arjuna gently replied, “Then princess get into the chariot. I shall take you to Krishna who is standing there.” In a few minutes they reached Krishna who received them gladly. They drove up to Indraprastha to receive Yudhishtira’s approval and blessing for their marriage.

Indraprastha was as yet undeveloped. It was a barren place where the Pandavas had not even a home to live. At Krishna's behest a city was built by Vishvakarma the architect of devas in a few days. With well laid out streets, gardens and palaces, the city looked most beautiful. The Pandavas now lived in palaces very happily.

Khandava Dahanam

One day, Krishna and Arjuna went out hunting in the dense Khandava forest. Agnideva had long wanted to consume this forest but without success. Arjuna now helped him to consume it without being drenched by rain by covering the forest with a roof of arrows. In return the Agnideva presented him with a shining chariot, four magnificent horses an impenetrable armour, the bow Gandiva and an inexhaustible quiver. Maya the clever architect of the asuras was caught in the fire and he was allowed to escape by Arjuna. In return he built a wonderful audience hall for the Pandavas. By a clever arrangement of mirrors this hall produced an illusion of the floor. Later Duryodhana was humiliated by this illusion and got insulted by Droupadi. This eventually increased his anger to the Pandavas, leading to the great Mahabharata war.

Krishna with his friend Sathyaki and the bride elect Kalindi now returned to Dwaraka and the marriage with Kalindi was solemnized with religious rites and festivities. Mitravinda the beautiful princess of Avanti also had longed to marry Krishna who was her cousin too. But her two brothers were partisans of Duryodhana and would not permit their sister to choose Krishna as her husband. So Krishna had no option but to use force. He invaded Avanti with a large force, defeated the enemy and carried away the happy bride to Dwaraka and married her also with solemn rites. Nagnajit, King of

Kosala was a good ruler. His daughter Satya Known as Nagnajithi had loved Krishna ever since her childhood. She longed to marry Krishna. Krishna, ever devoted to his devotees was also willing but there was a big hurdle. The old King in his anxiety to select a suitable bridegroom had stipulated that the suitor should conquer seven fierce bulls unarmed. This proved calamitous. Many brave princes had been gored to death. Krishna too now offered to try. Girding up his loins he divided himself as seven so that there was one Krishna for each bull. Catching each bull by the horns he forced it back on its hunches with ease as a child plays with a toy bull. After tethering them all together, the seven Krishnas became one again. The king was pleased and agreed to give his daughter to Krishna. As dowry the King offered a well-equipped powerful army and hundred maidens as attendants to the bride. Next he married Bhadra and the princess Lakshmana.

A Lover's Quarrel

An occasional little quarrel with one's own wife adds to the pleasure of family life. Krishna decided to enact this little family drama and as usual he did it perfectly, perhaps, too perfectly as he himself realized later.

One day Krishna and Rukmini were taking rest in the afternoon sitting leisurely in their jewelled swinging cot. The windows were open and a cool breeze from the garden laden with the perfume of flowers relieved the heat. Rukminidevi was as usual dressed at her best. Her golden waistband sparkled with gems. With her jewelled hands and anklets she looked divinely beautiful. With a peacock fan she gently fanned her husband. Her smiling face made her even more beautiful because of her adoration and love for Krishna. There was even a tinge of pride as she thought she was the dearest of all to her lord. Krishna realized this and perhaps to cure her of this pride,

suddenly said. “Beloved princess, you are the most beautiful daughter of the famous king of Vidarbha. Why did you choose, this beggarly Krishna from among so many eligible princely suitors? I am a beggar without any Kingdom and my worshippers are all beggarly sanyasins. Afraid of enemies we have taken refuge in a barren island out in the sea. Even now it is not too late. There is the rich prince of Chedi or many others who would gladly accept you.” Rukmini could not believe her ears. At first she was stunned then turned pale and trembled. The fan slipped from her beautiful hands. She swooned and fell down from the cot. Krishna now realized that he had played this hoax too well. He felt repentant for the first time and kneeling gently stroked her lovingly with his life giving hands. Rukmini gently opened her eyes and slowly began to speak. “Lord, what you say is not true. Did you not defeat the enemy scattering them like chaff? Dwaraka built by Mayan, has nothing equal even in heaven. Even Brahma the giver of boons, worships your feet. Which woman will choose an ordinary man subject to birth and death in preference to you who are eternal? Which woman will choose an ordinary man who dances to the tune of women like a dog, a cat or a mule? Even if I have to take thousand births I will stick to your feet alone and no one else.” “O my beloved, I just wanted to hear these words from you. That is why I played this farce. You shall be with me always, as a part of me and grant the devotees, whatever they may desire.”

This pranaya sargam famous in Bhagavatham has a curious episode attached to it. Poonthanam Nambudiri was a great devotee of Lord Krishna who lived some three hundred years ago near the famous shrine of Lord Krishna at Guruvayur. Once he visited and worshipped at the temple of Sree Siva in North Malabar. Sitting in the mandapam before the idol of Sree Siva, he read this chapter, the idol being his main audience. After the recital he put a bookmark, closed

the book kept it in the temple itself and left for the day. Next day the Namboodiri returned and after worshipping the idol was about to resume his recital. Someone had shifted his bookmark to the beginning of this chapter. The poor Namboodiri was puzzled thinking who could have shifted the bookmark from the end of the chapter to the beginning. Nevertheless he recited again. This shifting was repeated again and again and the poor Namboodiri was very puzzled when a deep voice from inside the Garbha griha – sanctum – sounded. “My dear Namboodiri! It was I who shifted the bookmark. Your recital was so sweet; I wanted to hear it again and again. My blessings to you!” Poonthanam was astounded. It was evidently Sree Siva himself wanting to hear it again and again. Sree Siva enjoyed hearing, repeatedly the lover’s quarrel between Krishna and Rukmini who are none other than Sree Hari and his divine consort Sree Lakshmi.

Krishna next set an example of an ideal family man. Though he had sixteen thousand and eight wives, each one of them believed that Krishna was with her only all the time. Senses and sensations belonged to Prakriti, - Nature –which was his own attribute. All the created beings are his own power. He was impartial and generated in each wife, ten sons and a daughter so that Dwarka literally swarmed with them.

Anirudha, grandson of Krishna and Rukmini was married to Rochana, Rukmi’s daughter in spite of the enmity between Krishna and Rukmi. Rukmi loved his sister and hence this marriage took place. Krishna, Balarama and the Yadava chiefs attended the marriage celebrations. There were festivities and celebrations and gambling with dice was one of the items. Balarama and Rukmi played against each other. Balarama suspected foul play, flew into a passion and clubbed Rukmi down along with his supporters. Thus, the festivi-

ties ended on a sad note. Poor Rukminidevi was inconsolable for a long time. Balarama, apologized and consoled her and she bore her sorrow with dignity.

Banasura, the grandson of the illustrious Mahabali of imperishable fame ruled at Shonitapura, capital of the nether world. He was a great devotee of Sree Shiva. When Sree Siva danced, the wondrous cosmic dance, Banasura accompanied the dance by playing his percussion drum. Pleased with his performance Sree Siva gave him a thousand arms. The asura used these thousand arms for aggression. He conquered the three worlds and soon had devas as his servants. He had the impudence to ask Sree Siva himself to be guard at the gates. Sree Siva agreed but the asura's next demand angered him. "Great Lord, ! You have given me a thousand arms for which I find no work. I have struck down trees and shattered mountains. Give me a suitable adversary who can withstand my blows." Sree Siva replied angrily, "Fool! When your flagstaff breaks in half and the flag comes down, know that your enemy has come who will humble your pride." Instead of getting afraid, the fool was rather pleased. He thought, "At last I shall get an adversary worthy of my blows!" He did not have to wait long.

The Story Of Usha And Anirudha

Bana had a charming daughter named Usha. Being a stern disciplinarian, Banasura would not allow too much freedom to girls and Usha was brought up in strict seclusion in the ladies' quarters. One night she saw a charming prince in her dream and fell in love with him and became disconsolate. Chitrlekha her friend, was the daughter of Kumbhantaka, the Chief Minister of Banasura. Noticing

Usha's sadness, her friend was concerned and enquired what he was like. The princess Usha told the details of his features. Now, Chitralekha was a good artist and she began to draw the pictures of various princes, and she drew the picture of Anirudha. Usha blushed and confessed that this indeed was the prince she had dreamt of. Chitralekha was a great magician. She could fly in the air unseen. She flew to Dwaraka; kidnapped the sleeping prince and flew back and deposited him in Usha's apartments while the guards outside snored peacefully. Usha was delighted and the two lived happily for many days until the guards became suspicious and reported the matter to Banasura. Banasura became furious and rushed at Anirudha with a huge mace. Anirudha too was a great fighter and retaliated scattering the guards. But Banasura making full use of his thousand hands and the naga pasa – snake rope – imprisoned him and tied him up.

There was consternation at Dwaraka. Anirudha was missing. Sree Narada Maharishi now appeared and apprised them of the situation. A great Yadava army was assembled. It was led by Balarama, Krishna and the Yadava heroes Pradyumna, Gada, Sambha, Satyaki and other great heroes. They marched towards Shonitapura and laid siege. When Krishna's conch the Panchajanya sounded the flag mast of Banasura broke in two and the flag fluttered down. Banasura, Kumbhandaka and other demons came forth yelling and a fierce battle raged. It is said that they used even biological weapons thus forestalling even modern inventions. It was a battle between the powers of good and the powers of evil and Balarama and Krishna triumphed. Krishna mowed down Banasura's hands – of which he was so proud – with his Sudarsanachakra. Only four hands were left now. Sree Rudhra himself intervened for his bhakta who was left with four hands. He pleaded with Krishna to spare the four hands.

It is said that even today, when Sree Siva is engaged in his cosmic dance in Kailas, Banasura plays the drum with his left over hands, to the rhythm of the dance.

When the war was won Anirudha was liberated. Anirudha and Usha were richly endowed and seated in a golden chariot. Then they were escorted with full honours to Dwaraka. Rukminidevi and other ladies welcomed them, their heart overflowing with love. Needless to say festivities followed.

Dragging of Hastinapura.

Duryodhana had a beautiful daughter named Lakshana. At her swayamvara, Samba, son of Jambavathy took her by force and carried her away as the other suitors just looked on. The elders – kurus – got offended. Duryodhana, Karna and others shouted, “This cowherd’s son has insulted us by dragging away an unwilling girl. We must imprison him.”

Duryodhana, his brothers, Karna and even Dronachariar with the approval of Bhishma, went in pursuit and surrounded Samba. Samba was a very brave warrior and fought like a lion but what could a mere boy however brave do against veterans like Drona and Karna? In the end the boy was overpowered and bound. News reached Dwaraka. The Yadavas were agitated but Balarama advised restraint and with a big retinue went to Hastinapura and camped in the gardens bordering Hastinapura and sent a message to his student Duryodhana. The Kauravas were indignant but still they sent a messenger with presents. Balarama received the messenger and sent a stern message through him. It was an order that Samba should be released immediately with due apologies and that it was the order of the king Ugrasena the overlord. On hearing this imposing order the

Kauravas became impertinent and shouted, “Who is this Ugrasena that dares command us. It is by our grace, he rules over the land donated by us. How can the shoe aspire to usurp the crown?” On hearing this insult Balarama became really angry. His eyes usually red now blazed fire. Taking up his dreaded weapon, the mighty plough he pierced Hastinapura and drew it across the broad Ganges. The great city tottered and began to move. Soon it was moving like a huge boat across the river. The citizens panicked running hither and thither. The Kauravas now fell at Balarama’s feet begging pardon. Duryodhana had been a very good disciple and mighty Balarama softened towards him and relented. The Kauravas pleaded. “Pardon us great Lord, you are the mighty Adishesha who bears the world on your hood. Pardon our ignorance Lord.” And the city stopped moving. Duryodhana was a fond father. He gave priceless jewels besides an army of elephants as dowry, and the marriage of Samba and Lakshana was performed with great pomp at Dwaraka.

Krishna the householder

Sree Narada Maharishi heard that Krishna was living as a typical householder with sixteen thousand and eight wives and out of sheer curiosity to see this wonder decided to visit Dwaraka.

In a moment he found himself in the outer precincts of the glorious city. It was beautiful with flowery gardens everywhere and ponds of crystal water sparkling and blooming with water lilies and blue lotuses with countless petals. Golden bees zoomed among them. Bordering the ponds were mansions of marble and silver. Peacocks and parrots freely flitted in and out through the open windows warbling pleasant sounds. Servants, male and female well dressed and wearing ornaments hurried in and out, obeying the orders of their

mistresses, the happy spouses of Krishna.

Sree Narada Maharishi entered one house at random. Krishna and Sree Rukmini were playing chess. Seeing the Sage, Krishna immediately rose in a hurry, came out; escorted him and seated him reverently in a couch. He washed his feet and with that holy water sprinkled his own head and Rukmini's. Then he asked, "Holy Sire, when did you come? Is everything well? Krishna asked him about the welfare of the world because Sree Narada was a citizen of the world always on the move. Sree Narada Maharishi replied. "By your grace great Lord all are well." Rukmini Devi fanned the sage all the time with a jewelled fan. After exchanging a few more pleasant-ries, the sage left and entered another mansion. Here the Lord was deliberating with his wife about the marriage of his daughter and he asked Sree Narada the same question as if nothing had happened, "O! Holy sage, when did you come?" In the next mansion the Lord was discussing with Udhava about the education of his children and in yet another mansion he was teaching his sons horsemanship and the art of war. In another he was performing puja enjoined on a householder and in yet another listening to discourse by learned pundits. Everywhere he put the same question to Sree Narada. "Holy sage, when did you come?" At the end of the game Krishna said, "O! Narada! You understand now that I can be everywhere?" "Pardon me my curiosity Lord, I knew you are everywhere; only I wanted to confirm." So saying Sree Narada departed singing the glories of the Lord.

He who reads this without carping will find his devotion increasing and his spiritual journey to realization smooth.

The Lord's Daily Routine.

As the cock crew Krishna would get up, perform the morning ablutions, put on fresh attire and worship the rising sun – which was part of him – and get ready to attend the council chamber. The charioteer would have got the chariot ready, yoked with four magnificent horses. All the sixteen thousand and eight spouses saw the same sight. The various chariots and horses merged into one as they entered the portals of Sudharma, the grand council chamber where the yadava chiefs like Satyaki and Udhava waited for him. Krishna would sit in the lion throne. Minstrels sang about the exploits of the yadavas and dancers gyrated at a respectable distance.

Once Sree Narada Maharishi was seen approaching, chanting hymns playing on his divine Veena. The lord with great reverence, escorted him to a seat and asked, “Great Maharishi, You are a traveller of the three worlds. Are all things well?” “All are well by your grace my lord! Your noble cousin Yudhishtira is eager to perform the great Rajasuya Yagna with your help at Indraprastha and requests your gracious presence.” As Krishna was pondering over the matter, there came another messenger, a Brahmin from Giri Durgah, capital of Magadha. He was carrying a pathetic request from the princes who had been imprisoned by Jarasandha. “O! Lord! We have been imprisoned by the wicked, Jarasandha, as we would not accept his suzerainty. He intends to sacrifice us to goddess Bhadrakali shortly. Help us lord, we beseech you. Save our lives.” Now, here was a dilemma. Which should be first accepted? Krishna turned to Udhava for a solution. Udhava, foremost among wise counsellors replied, “Lord! There is no dilemma. Both purposes will be simultaneously served by destroying Jarasandha. Let us go to Indraprastha first.” Krishna consoled the Brahmin messenger, “We shall assuredly destroy this Jarasandha soon and release the kings.

Please, go and give this assurance to your masters.” The Brahmin hastened back with the happy news.

Next Krishna started for Indraprastha leaving Balarama in charge of the defence of Dwaraka. Krishna was accompanied by a large army and camp followers. A train of palanquins carrying Krishna’s wives also followed. It was as if a town in festival was on the move. They passed through many friendly countries, crossed mountains, rivers and deserts on the way and finally reached Indraprastha. The Pandavas with Yudhishtira at the head received them with tears of joy. The streets of Indraprastha were gaily decorated and women from their terraces gazed with admiration at Krishna’s spouses and wondered with awe. “What merit have these wives of Krishna accumulated in previous births to get Krishna as their lord!” The spouses of Krishna alighted at the ladies quarters and Kunthi Devi embraced them and said, “How wonderfully kind is Krishna to men and women alike if they have devotion!” Yudhishtira affectionately lead Krishna to his quarters and in his extreme happiness forgot to worship Krishna with flowers and holy water in the usual way. So great was his love and devotion!.

After a few days of rest Yudhishtira gently expressed his great desire to perform the greatest of all yagnas the Rajasuya. Nakula and Sahadeva were sent in various directions with the sacrificial horse unopposed and returned with great tributes. Only Jarasandha now remained. Udhava now advised, “Let Krishna, Bhima and Arjuna disguised as Brahmins go to Girivraja and request Jarasandha to grant them fight. He is a great giver of gifts and would grant anything at the proper time.”

Fight With Jarasandha

The trio, Krishna, Bhima and Arjuna undertook the trip with alacrity. Disguised as Brahmin sanyasins they approached Jarasandha just at the proper time. He asked, "What do you want? I know that you are kshatriyas. But, as you are disguised as Brahmin sanyasins, I shall, grant whatever you ask, even if it be my head"

Krishna said, "Rajan! Your generosity is highly commendable. We only want to fight a duel with clubs with you! You may choose anyone of us as opponent. I am Krishna, your well known opponent. This is Arjuna the Pandava and this is Bhima his brother. Now choose!" Jarasandha replied, "I will not fight with you Krishna, because you ran away from our last fight. I will not fight with Arjuna also as he is too young. I shall fight with Bhima who is my proper opponent!"

Saying this he went in and brought out two clubs and asked Bhima to choose one. Bhima took one and then the fight began. Both were equally skilled and equally strong and the hills echoed with shouts and the thunder clap of the clubs striking each other. At sunset, the fight stopped as per rule and next morning it started again. This terrific duel went on for seventeen days. At night Bhima was sad and he diffidently confided to Krishna. "O! Krishna! I am trying my best but I am unable to defeat this Jarasandha!" Then Krishna plucked a blade of grass, tore it in two lengthwise and again put it together the top end of one piece now touching the root end of the other. Bhima took the hint. Next morning they again clashed and the duel continued as usual. Suddenly Bhima threw down his club and wrestled with his opponent and threw him down. Placing one foot firmly on the other's leg Bhima clutched the other leg and wrenched it with all his force. Jarasandha's body was split in two, exact halves.

Bhima put the two halves in opposite directions, crumpled up the two pieces of the body and threw the mass outside. There was a great hue and cry. His queens came crying beating their breasts. They cried aloud. “Ho! Lord our King! How great and strong you were! Alas! We are undone! What shall we do now?”

His son Sahadeva came grief stricken. Krishna comforted him, “Your father has died like a hero. It behoves you now to perform his funeral obsequies. You can make amends for the wrongs committed by your father, by releasing the prisoners and sending them back to their kingdoms with due honour.” Sahadeva agreed and ordered the immediate release of the prisoners. They were bathed and dressed in kingly robes and given royal gifts and sent to their respective kingdoms in golden chariots. As they left they sang.

“Oh! Lord! Oh! Krishna our saviour you are,
All this you have done to us, thoughtless fools,
We were mad after worldly power,
And deserved in full this chastisement,
We swear to be true to you, and you alone always,
Living the rest of our lives in the service of our people,
The deprived, down trodden and the weak,
May we have your continued grace help and blessing,
We shall meet again with all we have for the Rajasuya.”

The citizens of Dwaraka were getting anxious. It was more than a month since Krishna, Bhima and Arjuna had left. Just then the well known sound of Panchajanya, Krishna’s conch, was heard and it was soon followed by a golden chariot with flying colours. The

trio descended amid loud acclamations. All rejoiced at the death of Jarasandha. Yudhishtira was now the undisputed overlord and could proceed with the Rajasuya.

Elaborate preparations were made for the famous Rajasuya. Vast pandals were erected and decorated. Invitations were sent to all the fiftysix kings and sages like Vasishta, Viswamitra, Bharadwaja, Goutama, Parasurama, Bhishma, Drona and all the Kauravas. Brahmanas, Kshatriyas, Vaisyas and Sudras assembled in thousands to witness this crown of all yagnas and receive the blessings. The Yagna vedi was ploughed with a golden plough. Yudhishtira was duly initiated with the queens. Ladies ranged around and the devas, gandharvas and yakshas were present with all their paraphernalia. The guests were all duly seated and to the accompaniment of Vedic mantras the purohits bathed Yudhishtira with the consecrated water and gave him the soma juice. And now the lord of the yagna had to be selected from among the assembled guests. Now who was to be selected? Who was the most eligible guest?.

Sahadeva the Pandava stood up boldly and asserted, “Lord Krishna is the noblest and greatest. From him all things emanate and unto him they all return. He grants all boons to devotees. He alone is fit to preside.”

So, saying he sat down in hushed silence. Yudhishtira was extremely pleased and with great adoration presented costly garments to Sree Krishna. He washed Krishna’s feet with holy water and sprinkled himself and Panchali with that sacred theertha-holy water-and conducted the lord to the throne. The devas showered heavenly flowers on Sree Krishna from above. Tears of happiness rolled down Yudhishtira’s cheeks. The vast assembly shouted, “Hail! Hail! Bhagawan Krishna!”

On hearing this universal acclaim, Sisupala was unable to control his anger. He stood up and shouted, waving his hands wildly. “Stop! Stop this atrocity. It is indeed strange that time should bring about such change that even wise men and elders listen to the prattle of fools. Is there any lack of sages here? Bhishma, Drona, are here. Are they not good enough to preside? And Vyasa and these venerable sanyasins are present. It is a sin to overlook them and choose a mere cowerd. What a shame! Fie On your choice, I protest. He is a renegade, a breaker of all the laws of caste and rules of dharma. He is a law breaker devoid of any merit, a drunkard banished from the mainland and a fugitive in a barren island.” Hearing this unending abuse of Sree Krishna, some good persons in the assembly rose and left closing their ears. Sahadeva became furious and drew his sword. Sisupala’s partisans also rose, grabbing their weapons. Sisupala himself grabbed a sword and buckler and jumped into the ring. Krishna who knew the antecedents of Sisupala – he was a parshada at Vaikunta – threw the discus and severed his head. Then a wonder occurred. A shining star slowly rose from Sisupala’s body, floated through the air and entered Krishna.

After the above interruption, the yagna proceeded in great style. Since Vishnu – Sree Hari or Krishna - himself was the presiding deity, all the minor gods like Agni, Varuna and Indra were personally present to receive their oblations. Vedic hymns sung by learned pandits reverberated from the vast halls. Kings from distant lands had come with rich tributes to attend the Rajasuya conducted by Yudhishtira, king of kings. The vast multitude was sumptuously feasted and feted. Bhima was in charge of the kitchen while Draupadi supervised the serving and Sahadeva who was well versed in the sastras was in charge of supplying the materials for the worship. Arjuna and

Nakula were at the reception counter and doing general supervision. Duryodhana was given the all-important portfolio of finance and Karna had the charge of distributing alms, gifts and dakshina to priests. With Draupadi on one side Krishna on the other and his heroic brothers around, Yudhishtira felt so thankful that tears of happiness rolled down his cheeks. He shone like Indra in heaven in his assembly of gods and rishis. Duryodhana did not like all this prestige and glory accruing to his elder cousin Yudhishtira. It should have come to him. There was a blend of asura and kali in his blood. He fretted and fumed with jealousy though the whole world rejoiced. Before returning to his own capital he wanted to visit the famous hall of illusion built by Maya the architect of asuras. He went there with a scowl distorting his handsome face accompanied by his brothers. Seeing a pond, he tucked up his clothes only to realize that it was hard glass floor. Later he stepped on carefully across a seemingly hard marble floor and found himself floundering in a pond. From the gallery above women tittered and lady Draupadi audibly said, “A blind man’s son is blindly floundering!”

Swearing vengeance, Duryodhana stormed out. Though Yudhishtira and his brothers profusely apologized, Duryodhana would not be pacified. He departed to his capital Hastinapura determined to avenge this insult. Krishna, watching all this from afar, smiled. The seeds of the Mahabharata war had been sown!

Elimination of Salva and Dandavakra

Krishna and the yadava chiefs had to prolong their visit at Indraprastha at the earnest and almost tearful request of Yudhishtira, the Pandavas and the queen mother Kunthidevi. In the end, Krishna could delay no longer. There were ominous signs of calamities from a beleaguered Dwaraka. Salva the powerful king of Saubha took

advantage of Krishna's absence and invaded Dwaraka devastating the countryside. He was the friend of Sisupala. He had tried to assist him at the time of Rukmini's marriage and had been soundly trounced in the battle. Burning with vengeance he prayed and performed penance to please Sree Siva and when the Lord appeared, requested him to give him an invincible weapon. The lord gave him a flying fort made of iron. Seated in it Salva rained poisonous darts, serpents or sharp stones at the defenceless citizens of Dwaraka. Sometimes he let the iron fort settle down on the fleeing citizens, crushing them at one stretch.

Balarama the defender of the city was not at Dwaraka. In a fit of anger he had killed an upstart and to atone for the sin had gone on a pilgrimage to the south. Pradyumna, Samba, Gada and other stalwarts were trying their best to defend the city without much success against the magic of Salva. At this juncture Krishna arrived and launched the discus, which destroyed all the magic and severed Salva's head also. Close on this there appeared a huge giant named Dandavakra wielding a terrible mace. He was a friend of Sisupala, and like him another dwarapalaka- sentinel who was also cursed by the Sanat Kumaras –of Vaikunda. He too worked havoc until the discus eliminated him also, Peace and quiet once more reigned in Dwaraka.

The Story Of Kuchela Or Grace Supreme

Krishna had a fellow student, now a realized Brahmin though a householder, maintaining his family with great difficulty by begging for alms. He would not strain too much and was content with what he got and that was sometimes precious little. His wife was also of similar disposition. Sudama was his real name and Kuchela(poorly dressed)was only an appellation and the wife was called Kshudkshama because of her emaciated appearance. She had heard her husband mention about his great friend of student days, Lord Krishna of Dwaraka. Unable to bear the pangs of hunger and the sufferings of her half starved children one day, she gently reminded her husband “Dear Lord, you have told me sometimes about your friend Lord Krishna who is presently at Dwaraka. He is known to be a great giver of gifts. If you go and meet him, he will surely help us , Our children starve for want of food”. The Brahmin relented and agreed to go “But my dear”, he said, “I must not go empty handed when I go to see a great person” Whereupon the poor woman went out and got some paddy She fried and pounded them into flattened rice and packed it neatly in a piece of cloth and gave it to her husband.

He took it with great respect . With a walking stick and a pair of worn out chappals started on his arduous journey. On the way, he had only one thought “At last, I can see your beloved face again! O! Krishna! Krishna!” The poor Brahmin trudged along buoyed up with this one thought. He did not feel the heat or cold or even any weariness. It was a long, long way . “O! Krishna,

Krishna how blessed I will be” At last the distant spires of Dwaraka came into view. and he was at the golden gates. An unerring instinct led him on and he found himself entering the gates of one of the great mansions. Lord Krishna was resting there while Rukminidevi was gently fanning him. Krishna’s glance fell on the poor Brahmin wearing soiled clothes entering the gates . He immediately recognized his old friend and wiping a tear from his eyes Krishna ran down, the steps crying “O! Sudama! My friend, why did you take so long a time to come?” and clasped him to his bosom and slowly led him in. All this time Rukminidevi was closely following in stunned surprise. Krishna seated his friend on the couch on which he was resting . Rukmini was now fanning Kuchela and washed his feet with cold ganges water. She sprinkled herself and Krishna and all the attendants with it. Krishna gently said “Sudama, I am a big family man now. This is my queen, Rukmini. Kindly bless her and me”. And with that they both knelt before him. Krishna continued “ And of course you too have entered the grihastashram! And how is my sister and the children! Are all well?” Sudama could scarcely speak with emotion. “They are all well lord! By your grace” and with that, they began to talk of olden days.

”O! Sudama, do you remember, how, one day, the three of us (we two and brother Balrama) went to the forest to fetch firewood as required by our gurupathny and were overtaken by a great storm preventing return and how we spent the night on tree tops, shivering with cold. Before day break our guru came with burning torches and, loudly calling our names and took us back to the ashram. He was so touched that he blessed us saying “Dear pupils I am immensely pleased with your self less service! May you never forget the lessons I have taught. May you be able to

recall them when required. Only by a teacher's blessings, a pupil becomes perfect"

Like this they talked on far into the night, holding each other by the arm, when Krishna suddenly asked "Sudama, have you not brought anything for me?." Sudama looked abashed. Noticing this Krishna suddenly snatched the packet from under his arm and opening it exclaimed "Excellent! I like nothing better!" and grabbing a little put it into his mouth and ate it with relish! "Ha how sweet it is!" and he ate another handful. When he took another handful for a third time, Sri Rukmini devi who was Sri Lakshmi herself caught hold of his hand whispering "Enough! Enough! With two handfuls I have already made him rich beyond dreams!" Krishna stopped and Sudama did not understand what all this whispering was about. Leaving him comfortably in a velvet bed, Krishna retired. Sudama could not sleep for a long time thinking over the events of the day "A poor Brahmin like me ! An ill clad beggar ! I have been embraced by the lord of all wealth as if I was his own brother. Ha The magnanimity of the great!" Full of thankfulness Sudama felt that he was in heaven and slowly fell asleep. Early morning he woke up with the birds. Krishna was ready in attendance. Sudama again became Kuchela .He put on his old clothes , old chappals and took up his sturdy staff and stepped out. Krishna escorted him and affectionately said "Sudama! Do not forget me! Come again! Kindly commend me to my sister your wife, May God be with you ! " . He did not give any gift and neither did Kuchela ask for any.

"Alas!" He thought" I did not ask for anything. I know why he did not give me any gift. Wealth would spoil my tapas (penance). How kind is the lord!" Thinking like this, a little sad

nevertheless, he slowly wended his way back , homeward.. The familiar old land marks were missing. “Have I missed my way?” wondered Kuchela “But no, it cannot be!” In the place of his old house, there stood a great mansion with avenue of trees , parks and fountains. Well dressed servants were passing in and out. Even the neighbouring houses from which his wife had begged alms were changed. From the many pillared halls came sounds of music. As the poor man stood utterly bewildered the great door opened and a beautiful lady came towards him. It was his wife. The famished Kshutshama was now glowing like a goddess,. With tears of joy in her eyes she knelt before him and explained the mystery. The night before, some angels had knocked at the door with very precious gifts and had requested her and the children to come out. They were Viswakarma the engineer architect of Indra, lord of heaven, and his men . In a few minutes they built this wonderful mansion with outhouses and orchards and lawns., rivaling those of Lord Indra in heaven. Kubera, god of wealth was also there with his vast treasures. The servants, ornaments, provisions had all materialized from the air in a trice. As she was describing all this wonder the children came trooping in dressed like princes and bright like flowers in the garden. Kuchela too changed into golden attire, though he felt a little uncomfortable. Not only Kuchela, but also his neighbours had become rich beyond their dreams.

Thus Sudama the Brahmin though surrounded by luxury lived like a recluse with great restraint, remembering that all this prosperity was due to Krishna’s kindness his grace and attained the supreme grace from which there is no return.

CHAPTER 22

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Sk 10. Ch 82 - Slokam 1

The Great Reunion

There was a great solar eclipse and a great conclave of people from distant parts of Bharata converging for a holy dip at Syamanta Panchakam a lake near Kurukshetra. There were the vrishnies from Dwaraka led by Lord Krishna and Balrama and the yadavas from Mathura and Brindavan with Nanda, Yasoda and Rohini and gopas and gopis. All the kauravas and their acharyas also arrived. Kuntidevi was complaining to her cousin Vasudeva “Alas! Brother, even close relatives like you forsake unlucky people like me!” “Oh! not so, my sister! We too were oppressed by Kamsa,. Now, we are free and have come, you see!” Devaki with tears thanked Yasoda “How can we ever repay our debt to you sister! You were taking care of our children in those early difficult years. It can never be repaid ” And the two ladies clasped each other. The Yadavas and like minded chiefs congratulated the vrishnies “How lucky you are to have the lord of the universe as your friend and guide. Every day you play with him, dine with him and are not apart even when sleeping. What great good fortune is yours! Surely you are the most blessed of all beings!” The women had congregated apart. The gopis were curious to know how Krishna wooed and married the queens .

Krishna approached the gopis “You still remember me, my dear gopis? Affairs of state compelled me to stay here. Kindly, don’t be cross with me. Destiny unites people and separates them even as the wind unites the clouds and again separates them. Devotion to me alone makes beings immortal and by great good chance you have got the devotion good ladies. I am the beginning

and end of all beings!” The gopis now fully understood and replied “Grant us lord that we who are tied by affection to husband, son and others may never forget you and your words. May we be always devoted to your lotus feet!”.

Krishna granted their request and then turned to Yudhistira and enquired about their welfare. Yudhistira replied “We are all well Lord, by your grace”. All the great sages too had come for the holy dip. Vyasa , Sri Narada, Vasishta, Viswamitra, Bharadwaja and others. In that great assembly Lord Krishna proclaimed

By our great good luck we have got
What all good people strain to attain
The blessed sight of all these sages great
A sight not attainable even to gods
Holy rivers, gods and idols
Grant salvation in course of time
to pilgrims; But saints like you
grant immediate release by your very sight.
Neither fire nor the sun and moon
Nor the galaxies nor the mantras nor mind
Remove one’s sin as sages do
If you do even a little service to them .
He who mistakes this body as the soul
And thinks his wife and intellect as his own
And sees not the divinity enshrined in temple

Or learned men is only a donkey or a bull.

Hearing these words of the world teacher the assembled sages said “Even we, who have been the preceptors of kings, have been fooled by your maya (illusion) Who knows why you have assumed this form? Still we have an inkling You have assumed this form for the establishment of good and removal of evil. You are Time. These assembled kings and even your own clan do not know that you have come for the establishment of Dharma and removal of evil. Our salutations again and again.”

Vasudeva knew that the best way to repay one’s debt to ancestors, rishis and gods is through the performance of yagnas and so he desired to perform a great yagna. There was no better place or time as Krishna the Lord of yagna’s was himself present. The mantras were recited by the sages, seers of the mantras, themselves. At the conclusion after the final bath Vasudeva shone with splendour and the sages too left for their respective places. Nandagopa and Yasoda too were preparing to leave. Vasudeva said “O! Brother! This bond of affection created by the great Lord himself cannot be easily broken even by saints.” The gopis too left but it was only, their bodies that left; their hearts were at Krishna’s feet as always. At last Krishna and Balrama too left for Dwaraka. The rainy season was approaching and they had to be back at home in time.

Devaki Sees Her Dead Sons Again

By now Vasudeva and Devaki realized that their two sons were not just supermen; they were Maha Vishnu and his coiled power Adi Sessa. Thus emboldened, Devaki tearfully said “O! Krishna! Now we know you are the all pervading, all powerful supreme Lord. I have heard that you have brought your guru’s

dead son back from the land of the dead! How I wish to see my poor dead sons once more!”. The Lord answered “Those boys dear mother are now with Mahabali, in the nether world They were the sons of Marichi and Urna in Krita Yuga. Once, they had the temerity to mock lord Brahma for some silly action and he cursed them to be born as asuras. They were born to Hiranyakasipu but immediately transferred as your children. They were destined to have a short life only. Kamsa was only an agent. Look at them again now”. Devaki embraced the children and was content. In turn they prostrated before Devaki and Vasudeva and vanished in a blaze of light.

Krishna's Visit To Srutadeva And Janaka

At Mithila there lived a great brahmin devotee of Krishna named Srutadeva. Though a family man he lived on alms taking only the minimum without much effort and with this he entertained guests also. The king of Mithila the Janaka of that time was also an equally illustrious devotee and to please both of them at the same time Krishna started in his chariot driven by Daruka. A great retinue of sages and sanyasins accompanied him. Sri Narada, Vamadeva, Atri, Krishnadwaipayana and many others too were there. All along the people stood in groups with garlands and scented water and perfumes as offerings. Passing through Anarta, Matsya, Panchala, Kekaya and Kosala the procession at last reached the outskirts of Mithila. Both Srutadeva and Raja Janaka were waiting to receive Krishna. He assumed two identical forms and followed both without either knowing the trick. Srutadeva and his wife received Krishna and the sanyasins with kusa grass, holy water and flowers and fruits, seated them on mats made of grass and entertained them with every thing they had which was not much. But the guests were quite satisfied and blessed them with all their heart. The party that followed the king had a royal

reception with elaborate rituals, feasts and dances. They too blessed the king and his household. At the end of a month both parties, highly pleased and showering blessings all-round returned. And as they returned they coalesced and profoundly impressed reached Dwaraka.

The Hymn Of The Vedas

The deities of the Vedas now desired to praise the lord who had deigned to assume human form. They came hovering and with folded hands began to sing the hymn of the Vedas.

Thy Maya with her threefold gunas Veils, their master from these mortals

As clay changes it's shape when moulded

This universe too takes different shapes

You have created them and indwell

Them with your own spirit

Of all methods of reaching you

Bhakti remains supreme

It is the flower that blooms

In the tree of knowledge

It can bloom by itself too

If the devotee has but thy grace.

Bahkti is the fifth and final goal

Transcending even moksha .

This body is given for this alone

So develop Bhakthi step by step

This all important Bhakti is got by grace alone

Therefore we surrender to You without reserve

And may You help us in this quest.

Sanandana and the other sages heard this and departed to Their ashrams.

The Story Of Vrikasura , Sri Siva , And Sri Hari

Raja Parikshit raised a doubt “O! Maharishi! Usually we find devotees of Lord Siva getting rich and powerful very soon but not so, the devotees of Sri Hari. Why is it so?” Sri Suka replied “O! Rajan! What you say is correct. Siva is associated with the three gunas and so his worshippers get the benefit of these adjuncts. But Sri Hari is beyond, untouched by them. Your grand father Yudhistira asked Lord Krishna the same question. Hear his reply “Those I wish to bless, I take away their wealth steadily. Friends desert them and in despair they stick to me more closely and I give them the bliss of detachment and then there is no going back” As if to illustrate this Sri Suka tells the story of Vrikasura

Vrikasura

The wicked asura Vrika, once happened to meet Sri Narada Maharishi on the way and enquired “O! Maharishi! Which of the trinity is most easily pleased? Knowing his motive the Maharishi replied “Of the three Sri Rudhra is easy to please and he grants any boon”. Highly pleased the Asura immediately rushed off to distant Kedara, lit a holy fire and cutting off a little flesh from his body offered it as sacrifice to Siva. He went on repeating this until on the seventh day, when no more flesh was left he was

about to cut off his head to be thrown in the fire . Lord Siva himself appeared and held his hand “Why all this gruesome sacrifice my friend? I would have been pleased even by a handful of water offered with devotion. Ask what you want”. With folded hands and apparent modesty the asura said “Great Lord! Let any one whom I touch on the head, fall down dead.” Lord Siva was aghast at this terrible request but a word once given must be honoured; so rather unwillingly Lord Siva said “Be it so!” At the touch of Siva the asura had become whole again with redoubled strength. His eyes falling on Sri Parvathy Devi the villain desired her and raised his hand to touch Lord Siva himself. The Lord turned and fled, over the continents and oceans, over the three worlds and at last reached Vaikuntam itself where Sri Hari was taking rest and fell down exhausted. The story was soon told. The asura coming in hot pursuit was also panting Sri Hari at once changed himself into a young brahmacharin holding kusa grass and kamandalu (vessel) filled with water and asked with feigned surprise “Ho! ! Vrikasura What is the matter?” The asura gave a hasty account and his desire to destroy Sri Rudra. The brahmachari was incredulous “Haven’t you heard that Sri Rudra as a result of Daksha’s curse, has lost his powers. Why not test it by trying it – say on yourself” This was said in such a plausible disarming manner that the foolish asura immediately put his hand on his own head which split in two . And he fell down dead split in two halves. The devas with Brahma at their head now broke out in hymns and the gandharvas showered flowers.

He who hears this account of the rescue of Sri Rudra, will himself be freed from the cycle of birth and death.

Skāne Mejnēdēex ūe^onlepeŋpēe: kapejkā: >
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Recovery Of The Brahmin's Children

A Brahmin citizen once came to the court with a complaint “My son died as soon as he was born because of the worthlessness of the ruling kings. When a king just collects taxes and wastes it in luxury, evil raises its head” Krishna and Balarama just ignored it. This complaint went on year after year and when it was repeated for the ninth time Arjuna happened to be at Dwaraka and intervened “How is it, O! Brahmin! Is there no kshatriya here eager to help you? Never mind, I will help you next time” The Brahmin was not convinced and replied “When even gods like Krishna and Balarama or warriors like Pradyumna and Anirudha are unable, how can you help?” Arjuna’s pride was hurt and he said “I am not Krishna or Balarama. I am Arjuna and this is my bow Gandiva. If I fail to protect your son I will enter fire”. The brahmin was content and left. Before the year was out, the brahmin came again and announced his wife was about to deliver for the tenth time. Arjuna gathered his bow and arrows prayed to Sri Rudhra and followed the brahmin. Arjuna the master of archery, victor of many battles wove an impenetrable net work of arrows about the house and grimly waited outside awaiting the result. Soon sounds of lamentation arose. The child was born but before it could touch the floor it was whisked away. The nurses and the brahmin loudly lamented beating their breasts “Earlier we could at least see the body. Now even the body has vanished.” The brahmin was angry and even insulting “Alas! What a fool I have been to believe that this eunuch could do what even the great gods could not. Now go and jump into the fire. But no! you need not die; go and live

somewhere!” But Arjuna was a hero. He went to the nether world Samyamani where yama ruled. The child was not there. In turn he went to Indraloka, Chandraloka, Varunaloka. The child was nowhere. He returned dispirited, desperate and prepared to immolate himself.

Touching him gently on the shoulder Krishna said “Why this haste Arjuna? I will show you the children. They are in Vaikunta. Come, get into this chariot” Together they drove in the westerly direction over seas and continents. Soon the earth was left behind and they were travelling in space. Past planets, past stars the divine chariot and horses sped. They were now beyond light. It was fearful darkness. The horses slowed down and Krishna took out the sudarsan discus and it was again bright as if a thousand suns had risen. Now they reached the milky ocean buffeted by waves as high as hills and beyond was Sri Vaikuntam itself a vast city of golden palaces and Sri Hari himself resting on the thousand hooded Adisesha. Sri Hari was graciously smiling and adorned by garlands and kaustubham and srivatsam and the divine weapons now taking forms were in attendance along with the parshada Sunanda, Nanda and Sri Lakshmi was stroking his feet. Sri Devi was attended by modesty, fame, and victory, who had taken forms. Seeing Krishna and Arjuna Sri Hari said smiling “I have brought the brahmin’s sons here. I was desirous of seeing both of you together. You can return with them and restore them to the brahmin. “ Sri Maya now produced them and Sridevi herself presented them to Arjuna. They bowed low and returned with the children.

On seeing their children the brahmin couple were overwhelmed with joy. The brahmin now blessed Arjuna “O! Arjuna, Hero, Pardon me for blaming you unknowingly. May victory always attend your arms!”.

Krishna The Infinite

Maharishi Vyasa tries to give us a panoramic view of the infinite facets of life that Lord Krishna adorned, statesman, soldier, savior, a house holder; and an ideal husband to everyone of the sixteen thousand and eight wives. Each thought that he was with her only all the time; sometime sporting in crystal clear lakes; splashing perfumed water at each other and indulging in meaningless prattle

“O! Nightingale! You were singing all the night
Are you also sleepless like us for love of Krishna!
Great ocean! Are you moaning day and night
Unable like us to bear our Lord’s absence?
O! Moon! You seem weak and wasting.
Like us you too are famished for want of love!”

With thoughts like these and extravagant fancies the ladies of Krishna’s household attained with ease what sages and saints attain by penance and worship and various ways. And it is no wonder; they were incarnations of devis, sent in advance to aid Krishna in his fight against evil.

How they and their children helped Krishna and how in his infinite mercy, they too had to be removed will be the subject of the remaining part of Sreemad Bhagavatham.

The Curse Of The Brahmins

Krishna and Balrama had by now destroyed most of the asura kings , were now planning to destroy their own yadava army lest they should become a burden to mother earth.

Once Krishna invited the sages Viswamitra, Asita, Kasyapa, Atri, Vasista, Vamadeva and many others for the performance of a yagna and at its conclusion sent them on a pilgrimage to Pindaraka a holy place. Some playful youths bent on playful mischief had also followed them. They dressed Samba (Krishna's son) as a pregnant woman . Leading her to the sages the impertinent youngsters humbly asked the sages "Holy sirs, this bashful young lady wants to know, the sex of the baby in her womb" The Rishis looked and understood "You rascals! She will give birth to an iron pestle that will destroy all your tribe". The sages then departed.

The youths were startled and leading Samba aside took off his disguise and were frightened to find an iron rod inside. They now informed their elders who blamed them for their impudence. Hastily they powdered the rod .A small piece was left out . They threw it all into the sea. The waves swept the powder ashore where they all became a kind of grass (araka) and the piece of iron was swallowed by a fish. The fish was caught by a fisherman who sold it to a hunter. The hunter in turn fashioned an arrow head out of that iron piece. Krishna was aware of everything but did not interfere. The wheel of time was grinding slow but sure.

Sermon Of The Navayogis

Sri Narada Maharishi in the course of his travels came to Dwaraka flourishing under Krishna's protection. One day he came to Vasudeva's mansion. "O! Great Maharshe! The visit of holy saints like you can be only for our benefits. Be kind to tell us the essentials of Bhagavata Dharma" Thus implored, the sage began "I had told you that nine of the sons of Rishabhadeva had become sanyasins. These sanyasins known as the Navayogis, once went to king Janaka's court and he put them the same question. Kavi, the eldest replied "The root of all sorrow is the identification of

body with the soul. He who attains the feet of God is freed from this error and so is freed from all fear. The Lord himself has indicated the means- Dedicate every action done by mind, word and deed to Him. Thus come to him and be free from fear” . Kavi continued“ Hearing the elevating stories of the Lord Singing them aloud, boldly, unashamed

Your love for God waxes and melts the mind
You laugh aloud, sometimes you cry
Some times you dance, as if possessed
You see the wind, the sky, the seas and stars
And the creatures all as the lord's own body
And prostrate before them all
Then you get devotion, oneness and dispassion
Even as food gives fullness, growth and strength
O! Rajan! The devotee gets all these at once.”

The next sanyasin Hari said “He who sees the Lord in all creatures irrespective of who they are, he is indeed the greatest among devotees; who is just friendly only is a devotee of the second order; who sees the Lord only in idols but not in worshippers is a devotee of the third order only. A true devotee has no desires for sensuous things, he is not caste conscious. He never says “This is mine or that is his”. He is serene peaceful, and considers all as equals.

Even the wealth of the three worlds
Cannot make him stray an inch
The passions cannot hot him up

Whose heart is kept cool by the Lord's grace
Even past sins vanish like the dew
When the sun of devotion rises in the heart.

The king (Janaka) now desired to know about the origin of maya and Antariksha (one of the Navayogis) answered "Maya is the Lord's power using which in various degrees He created different creatures and these by virtue of their actions rose up in the scale or went down. The soul itself is not affected though it imagines it is by its association with the gunas (qualities satwa, rajas and tamas) Some attain illumination by their own effort and rejoin the Lord. The rest are thrown into the melting pot called Maha Pralaya and the whole process goes on repeating. The remaining nava yogis cleared all the doubts of the king.

Sri Narada finally observed "O! Vasudeva! Do not think that Krishna is your son only. He is the darling of all dwelling in every heart. But you are doubly blessed because you had the privilege of bringing him up as your own son. Sisupala, Salva and others were also thinking of him constantly though unpleasantly. Nevertheless they too did attain salvation". Hearing this, Vasudeva and Devaki were greatly surprised and overcame their illusion.

Devas Request For The Lord's Return

Brahma, accompanied by Indra and all the devas now came to Dwaraka to see the Lord in his present surroundings and to remind him that the purpose of his sojourn was over and that he should return to Vaikunta. "By reciting your exploits and stories with devotion you have provided an easy method for realization. Yoga, yagna, penance (tapas) are comparatively more difficult. You have achieved your purpose. So pray return" Thus prayed the celestials. Krishna replied, "I am aware of all that you say;

but a little more remains. My yadavas too have to be removed”. The devas were content and returned. But all this was only a make believe; another drama of the Lord. Actually there could be no coming or going for the supreme. He is present everywhere, every instant.

Now portents of evil began to appear in Dwaraka. The frightened elders went to Krishna for advice. The Lord said, “You have incurred the sage’s curse . To atone for that sin, go to holy Prabasa seashore ,bathe there and offer oblations to the ancestors and sumptuous feasts to the brahmins”. The yadavas at once got ready their chariots and started for Prabhasa.

CHAPTER 24

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Sk 11. Ch 6 - Slokam 43

Udhava, Krishna's friend and foremost among the wise knew that the yadhavas were doomed and Krishna was preparing to depart. He approached Krishna. "Lord! We who have been always with you awake or asleep, how can we live without you even for a moment?. Take me also with you Lord". Then taking him by the hand the Lord led him aside and in solitude told Udhava as follows:

"What you have said is true. O! Udhava! My mission is over. On the seventh day from now, Dwaraka will be swept under the sea. The age of Kali will begin. Men will become attached to unrighteousness. O Udhava Leave all attachments to your relatives and your own clan, resign yourself to me and wander over the world recognizing my presence in everything. Whatever the mind sees through the eyes , ears or other senses is the result of illusion. The illumined soul is beyond good and evil. His mind is like a child's mind.

Avadhuta's Twenty four Gurus

Udhava knew that time was running out. The Lord would be departing shortly. With grief gripping his heart he pleaded "O! Krishna, O! Lord! You say that attachment is the cause of all grief. I understand but it is so difficult to overcome, Lord!" Moved with pity for his friend, Krishna continued "O! Udhava my friend! I shall repeat to you the conversation between the Avadhuta yogi

Dattatreya and our ancestor king Yadu. Yadu while on a pilgrimage met the Avadhuta yogi on the way. He was young, strong and shining with the splendour of realization “O! Sanyasin!” Yadu said “You seem young and strong and yet are quite unconcerned with the surroundings . You wander like a child free from passion for sex or wealth or position, happy like an elephant that in the heat of summer has plunged in the ganges”.

With great kindness the Avadhuta told the king “O! thou grandson of Nahusha! Hear me then. I have learned some lessons from twenty-four gurus. They are earth, air, sky, water, fire, the sun, the moon , kapota (dove), python, ocean, river, moth, honey bee, elephant, honey gatherer, deer, fish, Pingala the courtesan, kurare (osprey), maiden, arrow smith, snake, spider, pesaskrit (wasp) Now hear the details.

A man of self control should not move away from his duty. He should be steady and patient like the earth. Like the trees he should give and do good always and be immovable like the mountain though buffeted by the wind and rain. Like the air he should move freely uncontaminated. Like the sky the self is limitless. It is pure always like waters of the ganges In the fire of tapas all impurities are burnt off. Just as the sun absorbs the waters of the sea only to release them as rain the Yogi takes up things only to release them at the proper time for the benefit of others. Changes of fortune only affect the body not the soul. This I learnt from the changes in the moon.

From the dove (kapota) I learnt not to love things too dearly. A kapota loved a kapoti so much that he would not take his eyes off her. They had their first off spring, a lovely little bird. Soon they had quite a brood. Both kapota and kapoti were entranced with their chicks by the Lord’s maya. While the parent birds were out finding food for the chicks a hunter caught the chicks in his

net. The kapoti returning with food was so grief stricken that she too cast herself voluntarily into the net. The father kapota, saw his whole family caught in the net and became desperate. “Alas! My wife dearer than life to me is caught and my darling chicks are also in the net. I cannot live alone!” And he too cast himself in the net. When the hunter came he saw his net full. He thanked his stars and took his prize home. I learnt from this not to love anything too much.”

The Avadhuta Brahmin continued, “Sensuous pleasures, O! Rajan! are available in heaven as well as in hell with an addition of misery in the latter. So a wise man should not hanker after pleasure.

So whatever comes by chance he should accept even as the python does. Like the ocean the sage should be still, calm, deep and boundless. Like the river ganges man should move on unperturbed by small rivulets and canals.

Seeing the antics of women who are verily the avatar of maya (illusion) the sensible man should not fall in the fire of passion like the moth.

Like the honey bee the intelligent man should seek essential things only.

The wise man will not touch with his foot even the wooden image of a woman. The male elephant is entrapped by contact with the female.

The wealth accumulated by a miser is knocked away by some one else like the honey gatherer.

The deer is enticed by music and caught by the hunter. Likewise sensuous music entices man as Rishyasringa was enticed. Just as fish perish by swallowing the baited hook a man who has not controlled his palate perishes swallowing unwholesome food. If the palate is controlled all other senses can be easily subdued.

From Pingala I learnt how to overcome greed.

The Story Of Pingala The Courtesan

Once there lived in the city of Videha a courtesan named Pingala. She lived by courting rich suitors. Daily standing in the verandah well dressed she would wait for the richest suitor. One day she rejected many expecting a richer one. As no one turned up she felt sad and then enlightenment came to her. "In all this great city there is none so foolish as me. Leaving the Lord seated in my own heart who can give me all I desire I roam after infamous creatures for wealth and perishing pleasures. Certainly the Lord is pleased with me because he has changed my mind..I shall devote myself to Him like Sri Devi and live the rest of my life in peace". Thinking thus Pingala concluded" Desire is the root of all misery Renunciation is the crown of happiness" From the kite I learned that possession causes sorrow. A kite got a piece of meat and was going to eat it in peace when it was attacked by a more powerful kite. The former abandoned the piece and was left in peace. I am indifferent to honour or dishonour alike. With thoughts of the self (soul) I roam about like a child. Only two types of people are immersed in complete delight; thoughtless fools and the realized wise who are beyond the gunas (satva, rajas and tamas) From the maiden I learnt the value of being alone. Once when a maiden was alone in her house a party came with a view to marriage. She began to husk some paddy to provide some food for them. But the bangles made a noise. Then she removed them all but two in each arm. But these two produced the same sound. She then retained only one on each arm and there was no more noise. The maiden finished her work in peace and entertained the guests. From this I learnt the value of being alone. From the smith who was fashioning an arrow head in the forge, I learnt the value of concentration. A smith was fashioning an arrowhead with such concentration that he did not hear even a

noisy procession that passed by. Sitting in a lonely place, withdrawing from rajasic and tamasic qualities and concentrating on satvic qualities alone, one can attain union with God. A serpent does not make a house for itself. It lives in holes made by other creatures. Likewise the sanyasin has no house. He lives for temporary periods in houses built by others. From the spider I learnt about the origin of the universe itself. The spider produces a world of nets out of itself and in the end destroys it by drawing it all inside itself. Likewise the Creator too has created this universe out of himself and in the end destroys it, drawing it all into Himself. The wasp places a worm in a hole and continuously frightens it by the sound of its wings so much so that in the end the worm itself becomes a wasp. From this I learnt that whatever a man constantly thinks, especially at the time of death, he becomes that after death. Finally this body itself is my guru. I had to pass through countless births and deaths to attain this. Though impermanent it has helped me to attain freedom from further births and freedom from attachment of any kind and I wander free! free! free!

And the Avadhuta Brahmin taking leave of king Yadu departed.

King Yadu too became calm, free from all attachments.

Limitations Of Vedic Ritualism

“O! Udhava!” the Lord continued “Vedic rituals have their reward but they too are limited by time . One may enjoy in heaven all that is promised for a limited time. When the effect of the rituals ends you are sent back headlong, back to where you came from. He is only like a condemned man being led to execution. He is given all enjoyments en-route but execution awaits at the end. Who can enjoy the pleasures ? Hence perform rituals of an obligatory nature without expecting any reward. It is meaningless to regard

any one as your own relative. It is the same soul that dwells in all. All the deities, even Brahma and the rest are time bound. So, come to me and you won't have to return. Because of my different aspects I am known under different names as Time, Atman, Vedas, The World, Nature, Dharma .

Udhava again asks “What is the difference between a man of freedom and a man in bondage”. Krishna replies”. He who is free from illusion is free. He, who has still illusions is in bondage. I have earlier told you the story of the two birds (under Puranjana) sitting in the same tree the Jiva and Iswara. The first is in bondage because it is subject to gunas; the second is not subject to them and so it is free with insight sharpened by dispassion .The sage is free like a man awakened from a dream. He neither praises nor censures. If a man is well versed in the words of the Vedas but not in their spirit then his effort has been in vain like that of a man maintaining a barren cow. If one is unable to concentrate and contemplate then there is the easier method of devotion. By dedicating every action to God and singing or reading about His actions and associating with the good, I am easily attained. O Udhava”! Now Udhava wanted to know more about the holy men he should associate with and Krishna continued.” The holy man is kind, never does a harm to anyone, forgiving, truthful, unperturbed in happiness or suffering and helpful to all. He is self controlled , soft spoken, pure, without any possessions, temperate, calm and steady and takes refuge in me. Never vain, ever respectful, kind and capable he prefers the greater duty to the less and he is the greatest of my devotees. He may not know me fully but still if he worships me with complete faith, I consider him as my own. Visiting my temple and fellow devotees; by service and worship, and singing aloud hymns that proclaim my greatness, listening with devotion to the stories about my birth and exploits he reaches me.

Taking out processions with music and drum
Going on pilgrimage and taking part in my festivals
Cleaning my temple precincts with sincerity
Adorning with lights and waving them before idols
And whatever is dearest, offering that to me
Seeing me in the sun, a brahmin, a devotee, a cow
The wind, water, all creatures and worshipping all
In general O! Udhava! Without bhakti and the company
Of the devout, there is no other way
And I have told you this great secret
My life long companion and friend
Irrespective of birth or rank; all sorts of beings
Have reached me. monkeys, demons, serpents
elephants and poor ignorant gopis
Thinking constantly of me through fear or distress
or hatred or love all have reached me .
Can learned pundits and brahmins be an exception.?
Certainly not ! If they but have this constancy
Yet another method is the elimination of the three gunas
Satwa, Rajas Tamas are the three gunas
By Satwa, remove Rajas and Tamas
And remove Satwa by itself.

Krishna added that he had taught all this to Sanaka (the first of the sages) and his friends. Udhava wanted to know more of that

and Krishna continued “The Sanaka brothers once asked Brahma their father. ‘ Sire, how can the mind be weaned away from the senses?’. As Brahma could not immediately answer, he thought of me. I appeared as a swan. Not recognizing me he asked ‘ Who are you?’ And I replied.

The Song Of The Swan

“Your question betrays your ignorance!

If it is with reference to the soul, it cannot stand.

For, all souls are one. If it refers to body

then too, all are same being made of the same five elements

So know for certain. that there is only Me everywhere

The self that sees this unity in the three states

Is in the fourth state Turiya

Seated there reject the other three states

As a man drunk with wine throws off his clothes

And like him wander, free, free, untrammelled.

Udhava said “ O! Krishna! The Vedas prescribe different methods

And now you say, Bhakti is the final crowning one

Pray! Remove our doubts, once for all.”

The Lord replied,

”Vedas too were made by me
Sages prescribe various ways for various states
For a man of no desire and no possession
All the world is full of joy
Such a man like you O! Udhava!
Is dearer to me than Brahma or Balarama
Dearer than Sri Rudra, dearer than even Sridevi
I follow close in that Bhaktas’ footsteps
And purify myself with the dust of his feet
Such a one enjoys a bliss intense, incomparable
A bliss not possible for anyone else.
Even when surrounded and assaulted by lust
My devotee is not overwhelmed
Bhakti destroys even passion
As fire reduces fuel to ashes dry barren
Even an unlettered pariah can reach me if he has bhakti
And without it not even learned brahmins can
When the heart melts and tears flow in bhakti
All sin is washed away
Speech falters, heart melts
The devotee laughs sometimes
And dances for no reason
My devotee saves the world

And at last gets dissolved in me.
As the mind gets purer and more refined
Hearing my stories and visiting my shrines
It develops an insight and sees the Truth
As when collirium is applied eyes get bright.
But thinking about sensual things
The mind is enmeshed, entrapped
And thinking about me, you get immersed in me
By keeping at arms length women and women lovers
Remain apart in splendid solitude
And think about Me free untrammelled
Udhava enquired “How should the aspirant think of you Lord
and in what form?” And the Lord replied
Seated at your ease and keeping the body straight
And your hands limp and free
Looking straight at the top of the nose
And keeping the air passage clear and pure
Practicing pranayama and reciting OM! OM!
Think of Me balanced calm serene
Smiling and kind with lotus eyes
Armed with discus, conch and mace
Anxious to serve my devotees
Surrender all your doubts and fears

And arise, free, strong and glad ever more.
To a mind thus attuned
Yogic powers (sidhis) come unasked
Small and light or big and heavy
Able to see far off things and guess their thoughts
Enter other bodies or travel through the air
Quick as thought to where you please
But the true yogi is not too pleased
He stands aloof quite unconcerned
Knowing that these are but mirages
Trying to keep him off his goal.
“In all beings high or low the yogi sees you Lord
In what forms do I see you with ease?” asked Udhava
And the Lord answered in a kinder softer tone
“O! Udhava! You are clever!
The same question was asked by Arjuna in the battle front”
“Alas! I am undone, fighting against kinsmen, elders
For filthy lucre and barren land
Fie on me! And him I answered thus
“I am the friend of all and refuge
I am all powerful, all devouring time
The smallest of the small I am the soul
Among things invincible, I am the mind

Indra among devas and Prahalada among asuras

Whatever is best, that am I O! Udhava!

Meet the end with mind fixed on me.

Then Krishna continued to describe the yugas, the four asramas, the four varnas and their duties

Krita, Threta, Dwapara and Kali are the four yugas and brahmana, kshatriya, vaisya and sudra the four varnas. In the Krita yuga there was only one varna brahmana. Men were all duty bound and there were four stages in the life of every man brahmcharya grihasta vanaprastha and sanyasa. These were the four ashramas. According to their nature people gravitated to these four varnas but the ashramas were open to all. For the brahmanas in particular the four ashramas or stages were paramount. Poverty or non-possession was a cardinal virtue and human nature is such that there were not too many brahmanas. King Yudhishtra in answer to a question by his father Yamadharma, in the guise of an yaksha, as to what constituted brahminhood has clearly stated “Not birth not family, not riches are the basis; conduct and conduct alone forms the basis O! Yaksha!” And the Yaksha who was his own father Yamadharma, agreed. The training of the Brahmin started early in a hermitage under a renowned sage. The disciple had to get up early, keep himself and the surroundings clean, gather flowers and help his present mother (the sage’s wife) in her household work. And then he had to go to the villages and beg for alms for his master. Then studies would begin. Philosophy, sciences, skill in arms and warfare were all taught. After some twelve years of such rigorous training the young brahmin, glowing like the fire could return to his own home and enter matrimony or become a sanyasin for life. If the disciple was a prince he would become a king or if he was a vaisya he would become a great merchant. Sudras would

drop out much earlier and become workers.

More About The Sanyasin

The sanyasin with no desire
Is bound by no further ties; giving up all
to the deserving poor and free from all encumbrances
He wanders over the wide earth, free as air.
The devas, jealous of their privileges
Try to hinder the high minded souls
They pose problems in the shape of wife
Dependants and the rest of family ties
Undeterred, wearing at the most the loin cloth.
The begging bowl and staff his only possessions
He steps warily; making sure he steps on no insects,
He drinks only filtered water and
Speaks only words purified by Truth
And conscientious in all his actions
He will accept alms only from the virtuous
And share that with gods and guests
Thus he travels alone; Always glad because he knows
the difference between bondage and freedom.
Bondage is subjection to the senses
And freedom is freedom from them

Wise he is; but plays with children
Though skilful he pretends to be a fool
He knows the Truth but wanders like cattle
Deeply learned but will not dispute
Neither avoids a crowd nor mingles with them
Will not sponsor extreme views nor insult any one
For bodily needs, he will never quarrel
Knowing all are one like reflections of the moon
Udhava appealed again

“O! Lord! For people sweltering under the heat of this journey of life, I do not find any refuge other than your gracious feet Kindly save us from this fire”. Thus addressed the Lord continued.

“The same question was posed by Yudhishtira the King
To the dying grandsire, the invincible Bhishma
Stretched on a bed of arrows in the battle front.
Hear his words “There is a unity, consciousness,
permeating all forms of life from the lowest to the highest.
Know that as the Sath; evident to seers
as the palm of their hand. Of the several ways
of seeing this Truth ,devotion is the easiest and most
pleasant too.
I have told this before. Still out of kindness I repeat
“Hearing with love my immortal stories,
By constant singing of my Bhajans.,

Giving up wealth and all enjoyment for my sake

One gets O! Udhava, my divine grace.

And then there is nothing more to gain.

One thus involved in devotion gains with ease,

Wisdom, power and all powerful dispassion.

Udhava was now in a hurry to clear all his doubts

“Lord! What is yama, niyama , sama, dama, thithiksha, tapas, sourya, truth and what is thyaga, wealth, yagna and dakshina and strength. Who is learned and who is a fool and where is heaven and where is hell, who is rich and who is poor. And who is a Lord and who is a relative. What is a home, who is wealthy and who is poor and who is pitiable. Pray remove my doubts once for all.”

The Lord answered “Yama is internal control such as truth; non-violence, lack of greed, sense of shame, belief in God, silence, steadiness, forgiveness and fearlessness and niyama is the means to attain the same such as, cleanliness, prayer , attention, hospitality, helping others etc. Sama is fixing the mind and intellect on Me; dama is control of the senses; thithiksha is fortitude; tapas is giving up of all desire and saurya or valour is conquest of one’s own nature and truth is seeing all things as equal. Dharma that accompanies you even after death is the giving of wealth to the needy. He is learned who knows the cause of attachment and release. The fool is he who thinks that this body is everything. Heaven is when satvic (good) qualities arise and hell is when the tamasic (asura) qualities arise. Strength is regulation of breath (pranayama). Your relative is Myself. He who has all good qualities is rich and poor is he, who is discontented and he is pitiable too. Who is unaffected by the gunas is the Lord and one subject to them deserves pity. Be thou above all obsession O! Udhava! Be steady.

As Udhava was closely following the Lord's words a fresh doubt now arose in his mind .

“Dear Lord, the Vedas were created by you.

There you have prescribed certain rules, and proscribed others

Now you say “Avoid both” Pray how is this?”

And the Lord replied “ Doubtless, the three yogas were prescribed by me.

What I meant was - Avoid desire in all cases.

For, desire leads to further birth and death.

Even devas and asuras desire birth on earth

To acquire merit to go to higher worlds.

Like a bird that has made its nest high up in a tree

That the woodsman had already marked down.

And before he could bring his axe and saw

Flies off to a safer place,

Man too must ensure a safe retreat

Before time with days and nights saws him down.

In this human body so easily got

You have a safe boat and guru as a pilot.

And a favourable wind sent by Me.

The man who fails to cross this ocean of life

Is one who destroys his own life.

If even in the beginning a Yogi has no illusion.

He must make his mind firmer still and motionless .

If the mind wanders a bit due to earlier vasana

He may loosen the reins a bit as one who trains an untamed horse.

And brings it back to full control.

He should trace everything to its cause.

The ego to nature; nature to earth; earth to water
water to energy; and that to God.

The mind becomes less and less brittle.

Becomes soft, softens to the Lord.

All desires end when the devotee desires Me

And I reign supreme in the devotees heart.

And then, the strings of attachments snap

All doubts cease and all your karma ends

And then I am seen every where in every creature.

What others attain with great effort

Through karma tapas, yoga or charity

My devotee attains easily.

Even heaven he attains, if he so desires.

But O! Udhava, My devotee desires nothing

No! Not even salvation.

He has reached the refuge everlasting!!

The Bhikshu's Story

O! Disciple of Bhihaspathy! The taunts and ill treatment of the wicked affect only the body not the soul just as the wind lashes the trees on the shore of a lake but not its reflections in the lake below, though they too appear to move. Now listen to the story of the Bhikshu of Avanti. In the city of Avanti, there once lived a rich brahmin. Though a brahmin he was a great miser. He almost starved his own children; would not entertain relatives or guests even with a kind word and spent nothing for puja or worship or performance of sraddhas for his own ancestors. His wife, children and servants would not obey him as they were continuously tormented and he would not spend a paisa for himself either. Thus devoid of dharma and kama the five participants of wealth became incensed. Gods, ancestors, the elements, men, and sages were offended.

The rains failed. Agriculture was ruined. Robbers broke into his house and he lost everything. With duty undone and deprived of any pleasure, deserted by friends and relatives, he became full of remorse.

”Alas! I have suffered and strained in vain

Neither for charity nor for myself I used my wealth

Verily the wealth of misers serves them not

For pleasures here or moksha there

The fame of the famous

And good name of the good

Both are marred by greed .

As leprosy mars beauty's form

Theft, violence, greed and lust

Anger, pride, malice , lack of trust

All these have roots in wealth.
Hence give up wealth
If you seek happiness.
Brothers quarrel, wives, friends, parents
Even bosom friends fall out over money
Having reached this gateway to heaven
Who will yearn for wealth the cause of all evil
Wise men torture their limbs for Self
This world is fooled by the Lord's Maya
So, for the rest of my life I withdraw
And may the gods help me now.
The time is short; but what of that,
Did not King Khatwanga reach the goal
In as short a time? “

With this high resolve this brahmin of Avanti rooted out all attachments and became calm. He wandered as he pleased and for alms sometimes entered villages and towns. Seeing the old man mischievous youngsters made fun of him; one snatched his staff; another his begging bowl and the string of beads and others snatched even his poor clothes. They would pretend to give it back and when he stretched his withered hands, would take it back again, and snatch away his scanty food shouting “This is that same old rascally brahmin now returned in this pious guise. Strike him bind him, this crafty crane”. And when he was down, some one urinated on his body, another spat on his head. But the old Brahmin spoke not a word; rather he began to sing.

The Bhikshu's Song

These people can do me no harm
Nor ill luck nor planets, not even gods
Mind, the mind alone is the cause
Mind that turns the wheel of Time.
Mind creates the three gunas
Creating actions white dark or red
And from them rise the four varnas

Charity, duty and all the laws
All are meant for control of the mind
Great is that Yoga that gives peace of mind
Terrible is the power of the Mind
Who controls the mind he controls the world
And he alone gets this power
Who has the grace of the Lord.
Happiness and misery are products of the mind.
So too are friends, enemies and this world itself
Caused by ignorance, darkness of the mind
Hence, dear one, concentrate on God
And this in short is the essence of Yoga.

Thus, deprived of all wealth and disowned by friends the
Bhikshu wandered all alone, finding true happiness at last.

Pururuvas And Urvasi

The wandering saint should never associate himself with those addicted to food or vice. Following a blind man one may also stumble and fall. Now hear the story of Pururuvas.

Pururuvas , a king of great renown , fell in love with the heavenly apsaras Urvasi and lived with her like one intoxicated . And when at last according to contract she left him he became almost mad . Luckily sanity returned . “ Alas , how low have I fallen . Of what use is learning and penance to one who has been deluded by woman ! And yet I should not blame her for she had often reminded me of my folly . “

Saying thus that king of kings

Withdrew his mind into itself

Roamed the earth without a care

Freed from emotions evermore

And now O Udhava my friend

Have you understood in full

Has your illusion gone? your doubts and your fears?

Knowing this there is nothing more to know

Having drunk nectar nothing else remains .

With folded hands and tearful eyes unable to speak Udhava was speechless for a time . And then he spoke.

“O Lord ! O Krishna ! All my doubts and fears are gone.

The darkness- illusion has lifted

Your glorious presence brightens all

The strings of attachment to clan and friends
It is all your Maya for the creation of the world
And now your own words have removed it
I bow to you again great Lord great Yogin
May I have infinite love for your lotus feet
For all time ! O ! for all time !

Krishna Bids Farewell

”Now Udhava! depart in peace. Go to Badaryasharam and there on the banks of the river Alakananda build an ashram. Clad in the bark of a tree and eating sparingly wild fruits, lead a hermit’s life. Bearing with fortitude the extremes of climate and free from all karma, you will come to me.” Sree Krishna concluded his advice to Udhava.

Though now beyond duality, he could not help shedding tears. Bearing the lord’s sandals on his head, suffused with tears, he circumambulated the Lord and ever bearing his immortal words in his heart finally attained Him.

He who reads this holy account will be immersed in the ocean of bliss and will certainly reach the Lord.

For warding off the fears of the world.
The Lord has gathered like the bee
The essence of the ocean of Vedas
And for letting us drink this elixir
We bow to the Almighty bearing the name Krishna !

CHAPTER 25

ॐ नमो भगवते वासुदेवाय ॥ १ ॥
ॐ नमो भगवते वासुदेवाय ॥ २ ॥

Sk 12. Ch 6 - Slokam 8

The End Of The Yadavas

Raja Parikshit then enquired “What did the Lord do after that O! Maharshe! And Sri Suka continued “Knowing well that the sages’ curse would soon overtake them Krishna advised the yadavas to go to Prabhasa by the sea-shore and there engage in worship and perform yagna while the women were sent else where inland. The signs were ominous. Death was approaching. They bathed in the sea, performed yagnas, gave gifts of cows and valuables to the brahmins. Then there was feasting and drinking. They drank without restraint an intoxicating drink and began to hurl abuses at one another. Some drew weapons, others pulled by the roots a particularly hard grass which grew in profusion on the sea shore. The hard grass had come out of the iron filings they had earlier thrown into the sea. Friends fought with friends, brothers with brothers, and soon the sea shore was strewn with the bodies of the yadavas. Krishna was aware of all this but did not interfere. All things must end. Bhagvan Balrama knew that all this was Krishna’s Maya. He entered a cave near the sea shore, entered Samadhi and merged in the infinite.

Not far from that place, there was a banyan tree and Krishna sat under it cross legged in the lotus posture, with smiling, shining face and four arms. A hunter on his usual round mistook the lords feet as the head of a deer and aimed an arrow fitted with the piece

of iron obtained from the fish. It hit the mark The hunter approached. He started back in horror finding that he had hit the Lord and fell down prostrate “ I did it unknowingly. Lord .I accept any punishment you give”. “Nay! Nay! O! Mura! You did me a service and for this I shall send you to heaven .” A vimana (aerial car) appeared and taking Mura in it flew to heaven.

Krishna’s’ charioteer following the fragrance of the thulasi garland worn by Krishna at last found his master lying mortally wounded. Comforting him the Lord said “O! Daruka! Go to Dwaraka without delay and apprise the elders about the situation. Let them leave Dwaraka without delay. On the seventh day from now Dwaraka will be submerged in the sea”. With tearful eyes Daruka obeyed. King Ugrasena Vasudeva and Devaki and the ladies left for the mainland. Arjuna accompanied and led them to Indraprastha.

Krishna’s Ascension

Now, there gathered all the devas and the guardian deities with Brahma and Sri Rudra at their head to witness Krishna’s glorious ascension. They showered heavenly flowers singing hymns of praise. The drums of heaven sounded. Deities of different orders were anxiously waiting to escort the Lord to their own worlds and even as they gazed, the lotus eyes of the Lord closed; the glorious enchanting form vanished like a streak of lightning leaving the clouds. Sri Suka observed. “O! Rajan! As the Lords advent and exploits were only a make believe, so too, his exit is only a make

believe. He, who, brought his guru's son from yama's realm and saved you in your mother's womb from the scorching fire of brahmastra, did not wish to leave his body here. All those, who sing with devotion this glorious episode will attain the same end."

Advent Of Kaliyuga

Arjuna who had returned to Indraprastha crowned Vajra, Anirudha's son, as king while Yudhishtira crowned Abhimanyu's son Parikshit as king of Hastinapura. Kings of various dynasties big and small asserted themselves all over the land. Kaliyuga was slowly covering the earth. The pillars of society dharma (duty), sathya (truth), soucha (cleanliness, purity), kshama (tolerance, forgiveness), daya (kindness) were weakening. Wealth was becoming paramount. Might was becoming right. Time honoured conventions for marriage were giving place to just mutual attraction and in ordinary business transactions deceit was tolerated. Manliness and womanliness were equated with just sex. The sacred thread became the only sign of Brahmin hood. Justice was not available to those who could not make the proper approach. Mere volubility passed off as learning. Tanks and rivers were considered holy only if they were fairly distant. Earning a livelihood became the aim of life and ability to impose on others was considered as Truth. Ability became synonymous with management. Cunningness replaced intelligence. Charity was done for fame. In a society, thus vitiated, those who were physically strong became the rulers who plundered the weak. Driven from their homes, they took refuge in forests living

on roots and fruits. They became stunted and life span was only twenty or thirty years.

The clouds dry up, giving out only lightning. Trees become dwarfish and plants producing cereals become small and only the fourth varna remains. All are like Sudras. At this stage the Lord again re-incarnates as Kalki, the son of a pious Brahmin named Vishnu yesas living in Sambalagramam. Fully armed and riding a horse with lightning speed he would flash through the land killing the unrighteous rulers in millions and crores. And the fragrance of the flowers in his garland would revive the drooping spirits of all good people still left alive. Krita yuga would begin again. When the sun, moon and the planet neptune appear in the same region, know that Krita yuga has begun.

Sri Suka Maharshi continued. “I have now told you about the kings past, present and future up to the dynasty of the Nandas. After thousands of years when Kritayuga again returns, the minds of men will become serene.”

In retrospect, O! Rajan! The mighty Kings who ruled this land have become just names. Seeing the kings bent on conquest, mother earth laughs and thinks. These fools, playthings of death! They would conquer me! Alas! They do not see death, standing by all the while! O! Thou! Gem of the Kuru’s! All those kings; they went as they came.”

”Now hear how the yugas manifest in an individual. sathva, rajas and tamas are gunas that manifest in individuals. When a person’s intellect mind and body are sathvic then that person is in

the krita yuga and such a person will have a taste for knowledge and tapas (penance) . When the person is interested in dharma (duty) artha (wealth) and kama (desire) he or she is in the threta yuga. When greed, discontent and motivated action predominate then that person is in the dwaapara yuga. When deceit falsehood, violence fear and anxiety prevail, then that person is in kali yuga. In kali yuga people are short sighted unlucky, gluttonous, sensual, poor and the women do as they like being unchaste. When kali is in the ascent, citizens will be robbers the Vedas will be polluted by the godless; the rulers will be parasites living on the people and brahmins will be sensual slaves. Students will have no discipline and beggars will have large families. Then hermits will live in villages and sanyasins will be greedy for money. Women will be short limbed, gluttonous, with many children and lacking shame. Bickering always, thieving and flying into tempers at the least provocation merchants will be dishonest and resort to devious deceitful means. Wives desert poor husbands servants their masters and the other way too. Abandoning, parents, friends and relatives people prefer their wives relatives the mean effeminate creatures! Sudras in the guise of sanyasins accept dakshinas (fees). They ascend seats of learning and preach about dharma without knowing or practicing it. In kali yuga, people quarrel even for a small amount giving up long standing friendship and even those near and dear sometimes end in fratricide. They do not protect their own old and disabled parents or even their clever talented children, engrossed in their own sensual pursuits. And finally O! Rajan! In Kali yuga people confused

by perverted philosophies do not worship the lord of all the worlds, Sri Hari.

He, whose name uttered even at the last moment by a dying man gives moksha (release) Him, they do not worship! The evils of kali yuga may be numerous. But O! Rajan! All these are easily crossed if you give the Lord a place in your heart. Hearing about Him in the company of the devout or singing or contemplating or adoring or showing your regard in any other way, He gets a place in your heart . He washes away the accumulated sins of even a hundred previous births. As fire burns off all impurities from gold so, the Lord removes all impurities from the yogis heart. All others, such as, knowledge, austerity, control of breath, observance of fasts do not purify so well as the Lord seated in the heart. Therefore, Rajan, with all your heart, give the Lord a place in yourself and then you attain the final grace. Though kaliyuga abounds in evils, there is one great benefit O! Rajan! By singing the songs about him alone, one is freed from all bonds. In krita yuga one reaches the Lord by contemplation in. threta yuga through yagnas, in dwaparayuga through service and in kali yuga by singing kirtans.”

Time Another Aspect Of God

The period of seven days allotted to Parikshit Maharaj was coming to an end and Sri Suka Maharshi wanted to impress that the soul is immortal. He took up the concept of time. In the Gita Krishna has said. “I am Time”. It can be as small as you please or

infinite both beyond imagination like the concept of God. There are creatures that live for a very small period like the fire fly and then die and their life is complete. Man lives for a hundred years and then goes out. Gods might live a thousand years and go out. Even Brahma has to go after a life span that staggers imagination. It is said that a thousand chatur yugas constitute a day for him and an equally long period is his night and he lives a hundred years like this and then disappears; but where do they all go, from the fly to Brahma? They merge in Sri Hari , Vishnu or Narayana or Rama or Krishna, there are a thousand names and reemerge or not as he wills. So Rajan! Be like a god; be God, you are immortal!.

”Leave off this idea of death once for all O! Rajan. It is only the body that falls. You are the soul and the soul is immortal, expansive like the sky. The indivisible immortal is in you. So, you are that. Compelled by the Brahmin’s curse, Thakshaka may touch your body but not your immortal soul.”

Convinced fully Parikshit said “Blessed am I by you kind Lord! It is not strange for blessed souls like you to go about, relieving tortured souls, leading them to light. Lord! I do not now fear Takshaka or death. I am entering God’s realm of freedom shown to me by you. I am free from all shackles lord! Allow me to go”. And then that great yogi departed, accompanied by sanyasins and honoured by the king.

Parikshit Attains Moksham

As for Parikshit, he seated himself facing south on the darba grass pointing east spread on the banks of Ganges. He sat there meditating on the lotus feet of Sri Hari. Takshaka the serpent compelled by the curse of the sage was now approaching. He was stopped on the way by a great healer the renowned Brahmin Kashyapa. Takshaka gave him priceless presents and made him return. Takshaka now assumed a disguise and struck the King. But Parikshit had already merged with God and his body went up in flames. The onlookers cried in terrified wonder and shouted “Hari Hari” The celestials sounded drums and cymbals-gandharvas, showered flowers and good men shouted “Hari! OM! Hari OM!

Janamejaya’s Sacrifice

Parikshit’s son Janamejaya now wanted to avenge his father’s death. He ordered the priests to conduct a great serpent sacrifice. A great Homakundam was built and with vedic mantras they invoked the serpents. Such was the power of the mantras, the serpents came one after the other and cast themselves in to the blazing kundam. Many serpents perished but Takshaka did not come. The priests came to know that Takshaka had taken refuge under Indra, Lord of the devas. He had coiled himself round Indras bedstead. When Janamejaya came to know of this he ordered, “O! Priests! Then invoke Takshaka and Indra together”. The priests intoned “Let Takshaka and Indra come together”. Indras grand bedstead

began to move and was now hovering above the blazing Agni kundam. Now Brihaspati ,preceptor of devas, intervened. “This must not be. Indra is our Lord and Takshaka has swallowed amritam and cannot die”. Janamejaya heeded the great acharya’s words and stopped the sacrifice. Blessing him for this prompt obedience the acharya said “O! King! Every man reaps the fruits of his own actions. Nobody is the cause of another’s fortunes. Parikshit committed a mistake, and so he suffered. Why punish the poor serpents.” Thus ended the great sarpa yagna.

CHAPTER 26

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Sk12. Ch 8 - Slokam 11

It is time for us now to take a long look backwards. The story began with that master story teller Sutha. reciting Bhagavatham to his brother sanyasins at Naimisaranyam, how Parikshit in a moment of anger placed a dead snake on the shoulders of the great Angiras Maharshi who was in deep Tapas and the unfortunate events that followed. One of the audience here interposed “O! Sutha Maharishi! Why do even wise people commit such errors?” And Sutha replied, “O! Sages! It is all the work Vishnumaya. The great Devi is ever on the prowl especially in this Kaliyuga. None can escape except by the grace of Hari, her master. When she approaches a devotee completely immersed in Hari without any reservation, she bows and gracefully withdraws. If she thinks “This person takes pride in things unconnected with the soul, such as wealth position, fame etc” then maya knows there is no truth in him. and casts her net.

Saunaka now asked Sutha about the origin of the Vedas and Sutha replied thus “From the supreme the sound OM originates and finds it’s echo in Brahma’s heart as the three gunas Sathwa, Rajas, Thamas and from the same OM rise the three Vedas. OM again materialises as the three worlds Bhu, Bhuva and Suva and the three states of waking, dreaming and deep sleep. From OM again Brahma crystallizes vowels and consonants and the seers or sages arrange them as Vedas, Rik, Yajus, Sama for specific purposes and the rishis impart them to their sons and disciples. By the end of

Dwapara yuga the division was complete and thereafter it was an age of specialization. Noticing the weakening of memory and intelligence the rishis summarised them as samhitas, Paila specialized in Rig veda, Vaisampayana in Yajur veda and Jaimini in Sama veda and Sumanthu in Atharva veda. Yajnavalkya, Mandukya and Jathukama were some of the most illustrious among the disciples.

The Story Of Markandeya

Sakunaka now observed “O! thou, all knowing Sutha, you have first-hand experience of all these happenings. We have heard of Mrinkandu maharshi’s son, Markandeya, who is reputed to be immortal and immersed in tapas somewhere in the northern slopes of the Himalayas. Pray! Kindly tell us about him. “ Sutha said “O! Saunaka, your question is opportune and well timed. Now listen, having gone through all the samskara’s (disciplines) performed by his dear father Mrikandu maharshi, the devoted disciple Markandeya entered the world as a Naishtika Brahmachari (bachelor sanyasin through out life). Calm, self controlled with the sacred thread and wearing only the bark of trees, carrying a kamandalu in one hand and a stout staff in the other he worshipped his guru , sun , the sacrificial fire and God, every morning, noon and evening. Glowing like the sun this bachelor sanyasin crossed many yugas. Indra, Lord of heaven now became alarmed and sent his apsaras (divine maidens) and gandharvas (maestros of music). A heady breeze with cooing larks and nightingales completed the picture and the god of love himself came with his flowery bow and arrows. The

bewitching damsels danced and came nearer and nearer but not too near for they would be scorched .The Maharshi was a burning flame. The god's arrows were burnt like match stick. The god of love was humbled and retreated.

Maya Darsanam

Sutha Continued

Those twin avatars of Sri Hari known as Nara and Narayana undergoing penance for the benefit of the world were aware of Markandeyas extraordinary tapas and they now decided to give him darsan and appeared before him. One was blue and the other fair. Both were luminous with eyes like lotus petals. Both had four arms carrying the conch, discus, mace and lotus. Markandeya overcome with emotion stood up saying “Salutations, again and again” and fell prostrate. Recovering quickly he said. “What can I say my Lords. By your grace every creature lives. Even Brahma acts inspired by you.” But Nara and Narayana insisted “We are givers of boons and we have come to bless you. Hence, ask a boon”. And Markandeya then said “Great Lords, if ask I must I submit. I wish to see Maha maya. This is the boon I seek”. The Gods smiled and said “Let it be so!” And vanished.

Markandeya returned to his Ashram by the Pushpa bhadra river and was engaged in his usual evening prayers when the sky suddenly darkened. A strong wind blew and clouds gathered overhead. Soon, it became dark and began to rain. It fell in sheets. The wind began to roar and lightning flashed in every direction.

The streams swelled and flooded the countryside. There was water, water all around. Markandeya buffeted by wind and waves found himself struggling for dear life.

And now to his immense relief he saw land! It was a small island well wooded with a great banyan tree with branches and broad green leaves . And on a broad leaf he saw a baby. It was no ordinary baby. It was smiling like a god. It was God Sri Hari himself. With two chubby hands it was holding its foot and sucking its toes. Markandeya fell prostrate in adoration and made an attempt to touch his feet. Markandeya was sucked in by the baby's in going breath. There inside he saw earth, heaven, stars, devas and demons. He saw his own ashram and familiar forests and rivers. Again he experienced Time as if he was again crossing the yugas and then as suddenly saw his own ashram and the Pushpa bhadra river quietly flowing by.

With a mind overflowing with gratitude, Markandeya said with great humility "I do not know how to thank you Lord! You granted me this vision of maya whose power even sages find so hard to overcome. "

Markandeya Has Vision Of Sri Rudra

It was evening time and Lord Siva and Sri Parvathy accompanied by their strange attendants were passing overhead when Sri Parvathy seeing Markandeya Maharshi in deep meditation, observed "Look at this knower of Brahman, Lord!. As the sea, when the storm has subsided ,is calm, so, is this Gnani's mind. You,

my Lord! are the giver of boons to such. Come! Let us grant him too some boon!” But the yogi, with mind fixed on Brahman was not aware of their presence. Knowing this Lord Siva by his yogic powers, entered Markandeyas mind and he suddenly saw.

Lord Siva with ten arms

And matted hair the colour of lightning.

Like the sun rising high in heaven

Wearing the tiger skin and a gleaming

Sword and trident and a garland of rudraksha beads.

And The Damaru sounding vedic sounds

And giving birth to countless worlds.

And gracious Bhavani smiling near

Waking up, as from a dream Markandeya said

“What can we do for you Lord!

Except bowing down and touching your feet

As Brahma, you create.

As Vishnu you protect.

And as Rudra you withdraw to yourself all.

Allow us to prostrate before you Lord!.

Sri Rudra said “Ask me any boon; we three are givers of boons. Whatever we give will be permanent, and transcend even death. Brahmanas of good conduct who have overcome all attachment, who are serene and love all creatures, are worshipped by us. The world, its guardians, Brahma and Sri Hari himself salute and follow them. These Brahmanas do not see any difference among us three. And they do not see any difference between themselves and others too. Holy rivers and idols purify men only in the long run but the very sight of holy saints like you purify them instantaneously. By hearing about you or by seeing you even outcastes are purified. Then how great will be the result of conversing with you!”

Hearing these nectar like words from the Lord wearing the crescent moon in his locks the Rishi was not quite content. “Strange are the Lord’s words. How strange that they bow before us mere mortals! They act like this just to uphold dharma and congratulate those who practice it. Therefore I bow to you Lord; the one without a second; the Lord of the three Gunas; the great teacher

Having seen you, I require no other boon

Still I crave one boon Lord!

May I have devotion always in Krishna

And like wise in all those who love him

And above all, in you too Lord!

Thus addressed Lord Siva said with Bhavani approving.

“You will have eternal devotion in Sri Hari

And all you desire and eternal fame

And youth without aging or weakening.

And the status of great Acharya of all Vedas and Puranas

After blessing Markandeya Maharshi and granting him, these incomparable boons Lord Siva and Sri Parvathi devi vanished with their legions and Markandeya Maharishi free from death and disease is now immersed in Tapasamadhi for the welfare of the world, somewhere in the Himalayan slopes.

And now we have come to the end of Bhagavatham.

The Great lord loves charity and devotion.

He who has them has all.

Call him by what name you like

He has a thousand names to suit a thousand tastes.

But he is one OM! OM! Hari, Hari OM

When the great lord is praised in hymns

He hears in sympathy; enters the minds of men

And cleanses it as the sun dispels all darkness

Or as the hurricane scatters the clouds

Vain are the words that picture banal tales

But hymns that glorify Gods immortal sports

Those alone are the Truth, They alone bring peace

They alone are meritorious proclaiming goodness

They alone please and are ever new

They alone dry up the ocean of sorrow

Those beautiful words that describe

The deeds of the Lord again and again

But words that do not mention the Lord

Though they be dressed in enchanting garb

Are like stagnant water in filthy ponds

Frequented by raucous crows; not by swans

Words may proclaim high morals

But if devoid of Krishna and his pranks

Do not shine even as actions not devoted to him

Will be fruitless, however cleverly done.

Study of Vedas and Shastras

Observance of Acharas and Tapas

May give prosperity; no doubt

But Hari gives himself to those who sing his songs.

Remembrance of Krishna weakens one's sin

Makes one pure and grants him devotion

Knowledge and wisdom and detachment complete

He reaches Sree Hari's lotus feet with ease

You have made me recall O! Rishis

All these secrets of the soul

As I have heard from the blessed Sri Suka

At the great Yagna held by king Parikshit

Graced by all those great saints of old

And finally dear Lord!

One last boon I crave

Wherever I be born in times to come

May I have unflagging devotion to your lotus feet

Grant me that my Lord! Am I not thine?

HARI OM

CONCLUSION

Some important strands in this mighty epic have been left unaccounted. We shall now take up the trend. It will be remembered that before leaving Dwaraka, Krishna had entrusted it's protection. to Arjuna. After Krishna's ascension a dejected Arjuna left Dwaraka with all the elders and ladies in carriages of various sorts. His idea was to escort them safely to Indraprastha. On the way, the caravan was waylaid and looted by robbers. The great hero of Mahabharata, the conqueror of countless battles was beaten ingloriously by a handful of rogues. Krishna's queens with Rukmini at the head of them committed sathee and Arjuna with tears in his eyes reached Indraprastha. Falling down at Yudhishtira's feet, he wailed "Great king, O! Brother I have been deceived by Krishna masquerading as our cousin and friend. He has left us. I have lost all my strength. The Gandiva responds no more!!" Yudhishtira realized that everything was over. He relinquished kingdom and kingship; installed Parikshit at Hastinapur and Vajra at Indraprastha and with brothers and Draupadi, started on the final trek to the Himalayas. Kunthi devi, Gandhari and Dhritrashtra had already left. The party went higher and higher up through thickly wooded regions and strange vegetation and stranger people; yakshas and gandharvas. A solitary dog was closely following them all the time. After some time, Nakula fell and then Sahadeva and then Arjuna and the redoubtable Bhima also fell and last, even faithful Draupadi dropped. But the dog still followed and at last Yudhishtira with the dog close at his heels reached the gates of heaven. There, of course, Indra, Lord of heaven, with his attendants was waiting to receive him with flowers and garlands. They were ready to receive Yudhishtira but not the dog.

And then said Yudhishtira "I do not want to enter heaven if this dog which has been following me so faithfully is not also allowed" And then a miracle happened. In the place of the dog, there stood Dharma the great lord of justice, Yudhishtira's own father.

And Yama dharma one of the great guardian deities now said “I wanted to give you a final test, my son, to see if you would be true and just even to helpless creatures. I am happy to see you, my son, so steadfast in truth. You have brilliantly passed all the tests, and now enter heaven!” But Yudhishtira still hesitated, thinking of his poor brothers. Now Indra asked him to look ahead and there wonder of wonders he saw sitting on golden thrones not only his brothers Draupdi and Kunthi Devi but all the heroes who had died in Kurukshetra like true kshatriyas.

And now dear readers, I have to conclude. It is with the greatest regret that I conclude. For, some of the finest moments of happiness I had recently, were those moments I passed writing this story. Maharshi Vedavyasa had written many wonderful puranas. But he was still not satisfied. After writing Bhagavatham, the story of Lord Krishna he was content and did not write any more.

Whatever philosophy or lesson is found elsewhere is found in Bhagavatham also. The word Krishna :means “ He who attracts”. As a child, youth. , statesman, warrior, as the great teacher who gave us the “Gita” he is inimitable. It is easy to find defects and scoff but those who came to scoff remained to pray as at that great drama the “Rasa lila”.

Here I could give you only a very superficial account of Bhagavatham. May your interest grow more and more and read the magnificent sonorous verses in the original. They are as deep as the ocean and as rich.

OM ! NAMO BHAGAVATHE VASUDEVAYA